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SILCOTE OF SILCOTES.



SILCOTE OF SILCOTES.

BY

HENRY KINGSLEY,

AUTHOR OF "RAVENSHOE," "THE HILLYARS AND THE BURTONS," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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SILCOTE OF SILCOTES.

CHAPTER I.

MOONLIGHT.

How wonderfully similar are all children to one another when asleep ! The same rounded half-formed features, the same gently closed eyelids, the same slightly parted mouth, are common alike to high and low, to good and bad, before passion or education has begun to draw those harder and more decided lines which sleep cannot obliterate, and which only pass away when once the first calm look of death is gone, and dust returns to dust. No such lines mar or alter the face of a sleeping child, or give a clue to the daily history of the soul within. Look from young

young Damon the shepherd-boy.

and transmogrified Johnny,

and various you, lying with

various his gentle, high-souled

and very nearly alike.

all off its guard,

even in gesture,

it seemed to say,

or was when

the sensitive of these

would say something

of the real

the little nobles-

a look careless,

wild not some

themselves

first found

the fine

wild

There lay a boy once in a very poor little bed, close under the thatch of a very poor little cottage, fast asleep and dreaming. At a certain time he moved slightly; in perhaps less than a second more he had raised himself in his bed, and sat there perfectly still, perfectly silent, looking and listening with the intenseness of a beautiful bright-eyed fox.

That is to say, that intense keen vivid curiosity—the first instantaneous expression which fixed on his face at the very moment of his waking.

Very few moments more, those very facile features reassive of intelligence and satisfaction in the tree. A minute had not gone by when,

subtle dexterity, the silence, and the rapid motion of that most beautiful animal to before compared him, he had slid from before the door of his room, with head, and slightly parted lips, upon his brave little

old
not

enough for him, not only to hear, but also to see every-
thing which went on below.

His mother stood below at the front door of the cottage, in the moonlight, talking with a man he knew well,—Somes, the head keeper. It could not be very late, for she had not been upstairs; nor very early, for he could hear his father hurriedly dressing in the room where he slept, a room opposite his mother's; and almost immediately he went down and joined the keeper, and the two men passed away into the forest, leaving the woman still standing at the door.

Our listener dressed himself with all the rapidity possible, for he knew that the moment had come for realizing one of the great wishes of his short life. His mother still stood in the doorway, and she would certainly prevent his going out, while, if he waited till she came upstairs again, he might lose his father's tracks. The bavin pile was close under his window; he opened the window, and, dropping on the fagots, clambered down, and, listening for one instant, with his head near the ground, he sped away after the faint rustling footsteps of his father and the keeper.

He knew what had happened well enough. The poachers from Newley were in the wood again, and their good friend, the head-keeper, had aroused his father to assist him. The poachers were a very determined gang, with a most expensive set of nets, which some said had cost fifty pounds, and would most certainly fight. On the other hand, the gentlemen, the keepers, and some of the hinds were exasperated beyond measure against this very gang. The coverts were poor and bare, and the pheasants, every one of them, cost ten to fifteen shillings by the time they were killed. Eighteen months before a keeper had been shot dead. The previous November a young watcher had been kicked about the head until he was reduced to a state of life-long imbecility, varied by occasional epileptic fits of the most terrible character, for trying to follow and identify some men who were killing pheasants; and now the same gang had paid them another visit, and were netting rabbits. There was no doubt there would be a grand final fight on this very night. On one side the Hall party, composed of gentlemen, servants, and labourers, armed only with sticks; on the other, a desperate gang of ruffians from

the low waterside streets of Newley.* James was determined at all hazards to see this battle, and his plan was to overtake his father when it was too late to be sent back.

The beech forest was blazing in the glory of the August moon. The ground, golden all the year round, by daylight, with fallen leaves, was now a carpet of black purple velvet, with an irregular pattern of gleaming white satin, wherever the moonbeams fell through to the earth. The overarching boughs had lost the rich warm colour which they showed in the sunlight, and were a mere undefined canopy of green and silver. The wood was as clear of undergrowth as a Canadian forest, and as level as a lawn; so it was easy enough for the boy to keep sight of the party he was pursuing, and yet to keep at a safe distance.

* *Professional* poachers are mainly townsfolk; and not generally, if you look merely at their rental, of the lowest (!) class. There are a good sprinkling of ten, and even twenty pounders, among them. I knew one well, the rent for whose premises could not have been less than fifty, and was probably sixty pounds. He was not, I believe, at the head of the profession, but was well known in it. He was fond of politics, fonder still of electioneering, a staunch and sound Whig. I remember well his driving the "buff" drag to and from the hustings in either '44 or '45. If I were to mention his trade, hundreds would recognise him at once.

For on second thoughts he did not care to join them too quickly. There were three or four gentlemen among them, and James was afraid of gentlemen. He would hardly have gone so far as to say that he disliked them, and would probably have pleaded that he had seen so little of them; but one thing was certain—he would sooner have their room than their company; and so he shuffled along with half-laced boots, far enough in the rear to avoid any great chance of detection.

There were eight of the party before him, holding steadily and silently through the wood in a line, and he knew some of them. Head-keeper Somes was a fine man, who stepped along from light to shade with wonderful elasticity and determination. His father came next to the head-keeper, and his father was a finer man still, broader over the shoulders, and an inch taller; but his father did not walk with the elasticity and grace of the game-keeper: forty years in heavy boots, among sticky clay fallows, had taken the elasticity out of *his* legs, and they seemed to drag somewhat; nevertheless that dearly-loved figure was

a very majestic one, or seemed so until the slinking little man noticed the next one.

The next one, the one who walked beside his father, was one of those dreaded gentlemen,—a man (as he got to know afterwards) in evening dress, but bare-headed, so that the boy could see the moonlight gleaming on the short, well-tended curls, which clustered on a head like a prizefighter's. This man was half a head taller than his father, and the biggest and broadest man he had ever seen. It was not this fact that attracted him so much: it was the man's gait, so springy, so rapid, so restless, and yet so powerful. He carried no stick, and yet seemed to be the most eager for the fray, for he was always out-walking the others by a little, and then with an impatient look right and left coming back into the line again. James had never seen anything like this gentleman before, and at once set it down with himself that he must be Lord Brumby, lord-lieutenant of that county, ultimate master of all souls and bodies in those parts, of whom he had dimly heard. Not very long afterwards he saw my Lord Brumby on a state occasion (which happened to be also market-day) in his lieu-

tenant's uniform. It wasn't his man at all. The lord-lieutenant was a little old man of seventy, with a face like a fish, but redder. Once afterwards James saw a fish like Lord Brumby, and asked the name of it; it was a red gurnard, they told him. Possibly it was better for that particular county that kind old Lord Brumby *was* lord-lieutenant of it, and not that reckless, hurling giant, Tom Silcote of Silcotes, whom the boy was watching.

The gentleman will fight for what costs him so much; and the keeper feels a natural animosity towards a man who he knows will kick or beat him senseless on the first opportunity; and the hind, though in some cases not guiltless himself, is well disposed towards the gentleman, whose wife is always doing him small kindnesses, and has no sympathy with the town ruffian. The whole party on the side of the law are perfectly ready for a fight. The other side also are far from unwilling; they carry firearms mostly, which gives them the courage of gunpowder; they are not easily recognised; they come of a ruffianly breed, who love fighting; and, moreover, their nets are worth fighting for. It would be difficult to account for the extreme

determination of these encounters, if one did not remember these things.

Such a battle-royal was coming off immediately, as James well knew, and in all probability blood would be shed. The party walked as silently as possible, and he could see that they were coming to a break in the wood, to a little open piece of upland meadow, walled round on all sides by the forest. There he guessed the poachers would be at work, and he was right.

It came all in a moment. The challenge came from the poachers. "Hold off, or," &c. &c. It was answered by Tom Silcote, who stepped out into the open, and said loudly, but quietly enough, "Come, give us this net here. You all know me. Give me hold of it. I must have it."

The poachers, who had run together, seemed as if they did know him. They seemed to hesitate, and to be inclined for falling back, when the tallest of them all ran suddenly forward weaponless and alone, sprang on Thomas Silcote, and cried, "Know you? *I* know you, and I'll have your false heart's blood this night."

The instant the two champions closed, the fight became general. James saw that the fight between Mr. Silcote and the tall poacher, whom he knew perfectly well (the keeper of a beerhouse, the Black Bull, in Water Street, Newley), was becoming a terrible wrestle. He minded that no more, but ran close in, to be near his father.

Two of the poachers had singled him out, and were attacking him. His father fought strongly and well, but very clumsily. Whenever he managed to hit either of his assailants with his stick, the blow seemed to tell, but he only got a blow in once in a way. In a very few minutes he found only one enemy before him, and he getting maddened, rushed in and cut him down with a blow of his stick, and, at the same moment, was felled with a blow from behind, given by the other ruffian, who had passed behind him.

James saw his father go hurling heavily over, and the man who had knocked him down making towards him. James ran, too. The poacher had got his heavy iron-shod boot raised to kick the defenceless man behind the ear, when his legs were seized by some one to

him invisible, and he was thrown forcibly on his back, and, before he knew where he was, he felt two tiny but vigorous little fists inside his collar, and found that he was rolling over and over in the tight clutches of a little boy, running a very fair chance of being throttled and captured.

They must have struggled together for minutes, these two ; the man cursing and threatening, the boy only ejaculating, at intervals, "I'll hold 'ee, John Reveson, I'll hold 'ee!" for the man had time to find that his comrades were beaten, and in full retreat, before he, not being an absolute fiend, resorted to the last expedient of freeing himself. He had spared the boy hitherto—he had boys of his own ; but the gentlemen were winning ; murder might have been done by one of his own party, which would make him an accomplice ; and the boy had recognised him and let him know it. There was only one way : he must escape, and the boy must be left in such a state that his evidence was worthless. He used his fists at last, and beat the boy about the head till he was insensible ; then he rose and sped away.

It was not very long before poor James came to him-

self, but he was very much hurt, and very giddy and sick. The poachers were gone, he found out afterwards, the nets taken, and many of them (who got their deserts) identified. He was in the arms of the head game-keeper, who was washing his head with a wet handkerchief. The others, with the exception of his father, all stood round him, and the first person he recognised was the gigantic Tom Silcote, with his white tie, looking down on him. He, too, was the first who spoke.

“This is a fine fellow ! this is a deuced fine boy ! How did he get bred in these parts ? He has got the pluck of a London street boy.”

The poacher’s fists had knocked a good deal out of James’s head, possibly, but not the idea that Tom Silcote was lord-lieutenant of the county. So he asked, faintly,—

“Please, my lord, how’s father ?”

“Father’s seriously hurt, if that is your father. Now tell me, my man, the name of the fellow you got down just now. You know him, you know, for I heard you speaking to him.”

“I wunt, my lord.”

"But you ought to."

"I wont tell on him or no man, my lord, not for any man. When I gets as big as father I'll give he cause for to know it. But I won't tell, not on no man."

"I like this," said Tom Silcote. "There is a spice of the devil here. Whose boy is this?"

"James Sugden's," said the immovable keeper.

"Give me the boy," said Tom Silcote. "I will carry him to the hall. See Sugden home and send for the doctor."

"The boy is as near his own home as he is to the hall, Master Thomas," said the keeper. "He is more used to it; and his mother will fret. These brats like the home where they have been bred best."

"Give me the boy, now, and no more of your jaw. I am going to take the boy home with me. Go and tell his mother who has got him, and where he is gone. Good-night all. Thanks for your pluck."

CHAPTER II.

FIRELIGHT.

JAMES was transferred from the arms of the head-keeper to those of his friend the lord-lieutenant, and found himself being carried rapidly on through the beech forest—every tree of which he knew—towards the hall. He was, so to speak, alone with this great gentleman; for, although they were followed by a coachman, two grooms, a country-bred footman, and page, these good gentlemen kept behind, noisily recounting their deeds of valour, which, to do them justice, were anything but inconsiderable.

James would have lain much more comfortably if he could have kept his bitterly aching head on the lord-lieutenant's shoulder. But that gentleman kept raising it so that he could look at his face, which he

did with great curiosity and amusement. At last he said—

“ You are a quaint little rascal—a most plucky little dog. I am going to take you to Queer Hall, do you hear, and get you mended.”

He said this so good-naturedly that James was encouraged to say,

“ Please, my lord, I’d sooner go and see after father.”

“ Yes, but you ain’t going, don’t you see,” replied his friend, “ which makes all the difference.”

Soon the forest opened into glades, though it still loomed dark all round. Now his bearer got over some iron hurdles, and they were passing through flower-beds, and then Tom Silcote began kicking at a door. When he ceased, James became aware of more animal life than their own ; they were surrounded by five or six bloodhounds, the famous bloodhounds of Silcotes, at whose baying, far heard through the forest, the woodland children gathering flowers or seeking bird-nests were used to raise their scared eyes and run home-wards towards their mothers, wailing—the more heavy-footed of the frightened little trots being dragged

along by their braver sisters—all their precious flowers scattered and lost in the hurry and terror of their flight. James knew that these dim, wild-beast-like figures, which were crowding silently around them, were the celebrated and terrible hounds, heard of by all, seen by few, the keeping of which was reported to be one of the darkest fancies in the Squire's darkened mind. James's courage utterly gave way; he clutched Mr. Silcote round the neck, and did what he had not done for four years before—cried out for his mother.

"Quiet! you little fool," said his friend. "If you scream out like that the dogs will be on us, and I can't save you. Open the door here, you asses!"

The boy was quiet, but horribly frightened. He heard one of the party in the rear cry out, "Look out here! I'm blowed if the Squire hasn't let the dogs loose. It's too bad." And another—"Stand close together! Mr. Tom, call they dogs in! D'ye hear, sir! call they dogs in!"

But the door was opened, and he and the man who carried him passed into a large and dimly-lighted hall with the terrible dogs all round them, and the door was shut behind. Then James was set down

before a great wood fire, with the dogs crowding against him, gazing at the blaze with their sleepy eyes, and now and then those of them which were nearest to him reaching their foolish beautiful heads up and licking his face. He shrunk at first, but finding they were kind got his arm round the neck of the nearest monster, who seemed quite contented. The night had grown chill, and he had almost forgotten his bruised and aching head in the sensation of cold ; so he enjoyed the fire, very stupidly, not caring who was in the room or what they were saying.

The first piece of conversation which reached his inner sense was this—it came, as he guessed, and immediately afterwards knew, from the mouth of a little girl. And its sound was like the chiming of silver bells.

“These dogs you understand are reindeer.”

“That is totally impossible,” said another voice, also a girl’s, nearly as pretty, but very decided. “If they are reindeer we shall have to kill them, and drink their blood as an antiscorbutic, and you are hardly prepared for that.”

“Let them be bears,” said a boy’s voice, very

like the second girl's—a voice he liked very much.

"In which case," said the determined girl's voice, "we should have to kill them in self-defence, if for no other reason. And I dislike the flesh of the Arctic bear; they are Esquimaux dogs, and must drag our sledges. And their harness must be made with hemp, or they will eat it. You are very stupid to-night, Reggy."

"They are reindeer, I tell you," said the girl with the silvery voice; "they could not be anything else. We have so much pemmican and things in store that we don't want them, but make them draw our sledges."

"None of the searching party did that," said the strong girl's voice; "they used dogs. These dogs are too big, certainly, and, besides, I am afraid of them. But they must be dogs."

"If they are not reindeer I shall not play," said she of the clear voice. "I am not going to winter at Beechey Island, unless they are reindeer. The snow-hut belongs to me; I stole the hearth-rugs and shawls and things to make it. Law! look at that

boy before the fire. My dear, this is an Esquimaux from off the ice in Ross's Straits, and he brings us intelligence of the expedition from Back's Fish River."

"It's only a common boy come in from the poaching expedition," said the stronger voice, "and a very dirty one too."

This was not quite so true as the remarks generally made by this very downright young lady. James was *not* dirty, though rather battered.

"My love, it's an Esquimaux. He is a very stupid boy; he ought to lie down on his stomach on the ice and blow like a seal to attract our attention, instead of gazing at the fire. Reggy, you must be Petersen the interpreter. Let us trade with that boy. 'Kammick toomee! Kammick toomee!' interpret for us, Petersen; hold up a needle."

CHAPTER III.

THREE OF THE FAMILY.

THUS adjured, James, dropping the head of the blood-hound which he held in his hand, turned round. The party of young people who had been talking so freely about him saw before them a little common boy, with a smock-frock, whose face was fearfully swollen and disfigured with blood. Their babble and their play were stopped at once, by seeing a figure more tragical and more repulsive than they had reckoned on. James, on his part, saw before him three children. The first which arrested his eye was a stout, strongly-built girl of about twelve, with handsome, *very* handsome, but rather coarse features, a very full complexion, and dark blue eyes, steady and strong as two sea-beacons ; she was the tallest as well as the strongest and boldest-looking of the

three. Next he saw a blonde babyish-looking fairy, likewise blue-eyed, with her long golden hair falling about her shoulders in cascades—the most beautiful creature he had ever looked on, but quite indescribable, for the simple reason that there was nothing to describe about her, except a general beauty, which was not here, nor there, but everywhere. And, lastly, this group of three was made up by a pale and sickly-looking boy, who, pale and unhealthy as he looked, was evidently, even to James's untrained eyes, the brother of the strong red-faced girl he had noticed first.

It was not difficult for James to connect the three voices he had heard with the three children he saw before him. The golden-haired fairy was the girl who had done the principal part of the talking. The stout strong girl, she of the determined voice, was the girl who had made objections to the original programme of their play, and the pale-faced boy was the owner of the voice he had liked so much, the boy who had said that the dogs must represent bears.

James, for the first time in his life, had the pleasure of throwing the whole of a company (very limited

on this occasion) into confusion. So far from acting Esquimaux, and being traded with, he turned his battered face on them, and said in good enough English—

“I know what you are aiming at. But I can’t be an Esquimaux to-night. I know all about the Great Fish River, and the pemmican, and the Magnetic Pole is in Boothia Felix. I’d willingly play with you. I’d be a bear, and come growling round your hut smelling the seal blubber; or I’d be the great brown jaguar, bigger than the biggest Bengal tiger, and I’d lie under the palm-tree, and work my claws, and you should be Humboldt, picking of cow-slips and not noticing me: or I’d be Villeneuve, or Gravina, or Soult, or any of that lot short of Buonaparte, and you should be Lord Nelson or Lord Hill. But I can’t play to-night. I want to be took home to mother and put to bed.”

“My dear souls,” said Anne, the bright-haired fairy, to the other two, “this boy is no Esquimaux. He is one of the lost expedition.”

“Don’t be silly, Anne,” said Dora, the tall strong

girl. "The boy has been badly beaten by the poachers, and should be looked after."

"Why don't you go and look after him?" demanded Anne.

"Because," said Dora, "I am afraid of those dogs which are all round him. Ah! you need not turn up your nose, for you are a regular coward. You are afraid of thunder and lightning; you are afraid of frogs; you are afraid of old Mrs. Halfacre, because the Princess says she is a witch; you are afraid of walking through stinging nettles; and you cry when you go through a lock. I am afraid of those dogs, and so is Reggy. I can't think why grandpa keeps such a lot of brutes about the place."

"You have no business to wonder. Grandpa does as he chooses. And I am *not* afraid of frogs; I am only afraid of toads, which spit venom at you. You are such a cockney, you don't know a toad from a frog. This is a much better place than Lancaster Square."

"That's true enough," said Dora; "but that will never stop me speaking *my* mind, not to grandpa himself, leave alone you. If you are really not afraid of

those dogs, make yourself useful. Get them away from the boy, and let me get at him."

"*I am not afraid of the dogs,*" said Anne. "But why don't you call the boy out from amongst them if you want him?"

This was an excellent suggestion, and Dora had not thought of that solution so soon as the quicker-witted Anne. She would have acted on Anne's advice doubtless, had not the low growl of a voice they knew well silenced all the children, and made them retire into a corner, preparatory to skulking off to the free regions above stairs as soon as they were sufficiently unobserved, while James was still left standing before the fire among the dogs. Three faces came out of the darkness into the light of the fire, and two candlesticks on the mantelpiece, towards him; the faces of three men.

The first that of the gigantic gentleman who had carried him home that night,—a handsome face with a black moustache on it, and very bold wild dark eyes; not a remarkable face in any way, if you except its commonplace beauty. The mouth belonging to that face I never saw, and it is very difficult to guess at a mouth under a moustache; but the reckless ease of

every pose the man made would tell one almost as much of the man's character as his mouth. The next face the boy saw was very different, and the moment he looked on it he knew that he was looking on the "Dark Squire" at a nearer distance than he ever looked before.

He had seen the Squire before, often and often ; but he had never dared to look at Dark Silcote any more than he had dared to look at the lightning which shattered the ash-tree close to him, and killed two of the sheep he was minding, sheep not so much frightened as their shepherd ; or than he would have dared to look at any of the numerous ghosts with which rustic imagination had peopled the great beech forest of Boisey. Lightning, ghosts, and the Dark Squire were the sort of things he let go by with a touch of the cap, as necessary evils ; right of course because they were there, but which, in sceptical moments, he wished were anywhere else. He now saw the Dark Squire close to him, in the most careless manner, and looked at him closely—for the dull stupid aching left by the poacher's fist made him careless about fifty dark squires. Let us see the Squire with him.

A very broad man, of great physical power still, though nearly sixty: with a finely-shaped head (was it narrow? perhaps it was narrow), covered with close-cut grizzled hair: possibly longer in proportion to its breadth than it need have been. Perfect features, perfect complexion, the face of the handsomest man, for his time of life, that one is likely to meet with. There were two great faults in it: one of natural formation, the other of acquired habit. The eyes were set too deep under those heavy black eyebrows, which had refused to grow grey with the hair, and were set too close together; and there was a continual look of suspicion about the whole face which I cannot describe, and which it is rather in the way of Mr. Calderon to paint.

Such a man was the terrible Squire. Beside him stood the third gentleman, with his hand laid on the Squire's shoulder, the fingers of which hand were carelessly playing a tune on the Squire's coat. There was one man in the world then to whom this fearful old man was not terrible,—apparently one, and, stranger still, this one a parson. Silcote had openly and offensively severed himself from the Church and

from any form of faith years and years before ; his infidelity, nay, some said his open profanity, was notorious ; but here was a clergyman (with rather a High Church cut waistcoat, too), coolly playing a tune on his shoulder.

And not a very remarkable-looking man either. Not very handsome, or very tall, with bold eyes like his brother's, face very thin and very pale, and looking extremely young. You would have said, at first sight, that he was a B.A. in deacon's orders at the very furthest. But, if you looked at him longer, and heard him speak a few times, you altered your opinion. He still looked young ; there was not a down on his pale face ; but there was a steadiness of eye, a quiet easiness of motion, as of one who had been accustomed to use his limbs in decent moderation for some time ; a perfectly cool self-possession in his manner ; nay, more than that, a degree of self-consciousness and a tendency to dictate, as of a man who has lived among clever men, and has been accustomed to wit as well as to argument, which in society might be considered almost offensive ; and a curl of the mouth which readily expanded into a

short laugh. All these little traits made you, after you had given up your first B.A. deacon's orders theory, begin to think about all the new young schoolmasters you had seen lately, and to put him down for a second or third master at Cheltenham or Marlborough. You were wrong in both guesses. He was the youngest tutor at Balliol.

Not only the youngest, but by common consent, both of the undergraduates, and such of the fellows as had not forgotten the slang of former years, the "cheekiest" or "cockiest." The very first time he appeared in the common room he showed his mettle by his reckless, honest audacity, his utter carelessness of university rank or prestige, and his amazing brilliancy in conversation. Arthur Silcote was, undoubtedly, a success in the common room at Balliol, in spite of what some men might call his self-sufficient impudence. The oldest and wisest of the fellows seduced him out of that same common room that night, and got Arthur to smoke a cigar with him while they walked up and down in front of Magdalen Hall and All Souls, with all the mighty cliffs of stone around them.

"Silcote," said the elder fellow, "will you tell me this: How is it that you, as genial, kind-hearted, well-conditioned a man as ever breathed, are not popular with the undergraduates? Nay more, why are you so very unpopular?"

"You hit me hard. I am very clever, am I not? but I can't find that out. Have you? God knows I would do anything to bid for their popularity."

"Have I *found* it out? No, I have seen it for the last three years. You ask me if you are clever. I answer, you are one of the cleverest men I ever saw; so *clever*" (pause not long enough to be offensive) "that your cleverness has become a vice. You are too impatient to bear with men, not to say boys, less clever than yourself. You cannot 'suffer fools gladly,' my boy. You are impatient and scornful of all ignorance which is relatively greater than your own ignorance; and yet your own ignorance, like that of all men of three-and-twenty, is very great. You have made a success to-night. Why? because you were afraid of us; you had not time to find out our weak points. You would become as unpopular in the common room as you are among the undergraduates,

if you were left alone. Silcote, you must learn to be tender, ay, and to *respect* in a way, ignorance, as you do childhood and womanhood, weakness in every form. What is the extent of the visible horizon, Silcote, at 1,500 feet above the level of the sea?"

Silcote did not know.

"No more do I. But the eighteenth wrangler at Cambridge would tell us, I don't doubt. You are very clever, and for a lad know a good deal. But put your knowledge against Humboldt's, and where are you? Put your knowledge—I speak solemnly, as I feel—against the Almighty's, and where are you then, poor child? Suppose He treated your ignorance and mine with the same petulant impatience you treat the ignorance of men but little your inferiors, where should we be?"

"You need say no more," said Arthur Silcote.

"Only in apology," continued the other. "I risked saying this much to you, because I have a very great admiration for you, and because I saw in you the germs of that priggishness (you know what I mean) which is one of the curses of this time and this place, developing in you. Cure this. Get rid of that mis-

erable habit of being impatient of other men's weak points as though you had none of your own, and you will be a good man. Encourage and develop it, and your influence over other men is gone. The sole result of your sharp-tongued attacks on other men's opinions in the Union and elsewhere has been to make you disliked and distrusted. Give over this trick. It is a very silly one. No man with this trick (save one perhaps,) ever got any high influence in the world. In the House this is called temper; and, young and foolish as you are, you are old enough to know how utterly a charge of bad temper ruins a man's influence there."

CHAPTER IV.

A FOURTH.

THE Squire spoke first. "So this is the boy that you, Tom, by that fellow-feeling which exists among all fools, have whisked away from his mother, and brought here to show me. I don't know which of you is the greatest fool, upon my word—you for bringing him, or the boy for coming. Don't you know I hate children? What have you done it for? If the boy has any claim on you, it was not correct, sir, to bring him here at all."

"*I* don't so much as know the boy's name," said Captain Silcote. "I took a fancy to his courage and determination, and brought him home to see if you could be got to do something for him. Make him a page, or a stable boy, or something."

"Because he fights with desperate ferocity, is well acquainted with at least one notorious poacher, and refuses to have him brought to justice. *Bien?*"

"Oh, if you are going to put it *your way*, of course I give up. *I was* a fool to have brought him here, and to *you*. Here, come with me, boy, and we will away out of this."

The Squire laughed. "Arthur," he said, "will you be so good on this occasion, as on many others, to relieve me from the consequences of your brother's folly, and take care of the child?"

"I will take care of the child, certainly; but I will not acknowledge Tom's folly. Tom did kindly and well in bringing the boy home. And don't scold him to-day, the first day we have had him for so long."

"*He* don't care," growled Captain Silcote. "If I had been away six years instead of six months, it would be just the same."

"You only come back when you want your debts paid."

"Father! Father! Tom!" said Arthur, and with some effect, for they ceased what would soon have grown into a very disagreeable wrangle, and he took

the boy kindly by the hand, and was going to lead him away, when the arrival of another person arrested their departure, and aroused the boy's astonishment to a high degree.

The hall was partly dark, and now there came towards them a figure whose dress was darker than the darkness itself. Unutterably black until you came to its breast, and there flamed a brilliant star: above that the shape of a pale human face. It advanced majestically, and was for a few moments an extremely puzzling and somewhat alarming figure, before it came into the light, and James saw that after all it was not a black ghost, but only a very tall pale lady, dressed in a black velvet gown, with a very large diamond cross on her bosom. We may supplement his observation by adding that the great sweep of coal-black velvet and the diamond cross were topped by a very pale, amiable, beautiful, and exceedingly foolish face,—that the lady, whose figure at last stood out in the light, was very tall, very handsome, and seemed to understand the putting on of clothes, and the arranging of herself into attitudes, without running into the extreme of theatrical posing, better than the great majority of women. That

is all I have to say about her at present, and indeed there is little more to say. Her actions must tell their own story.

Arthur saw her first, and called his father's attention to her presence. "The Princess of Castelnuovo, father," he said, and the Squire turned. The result was a "hip" bow from the Squire, and a splendid, graceful, sweeping curtsey from the Princess, accompanied by a most pleasant smile.

"That was a beautiful curtsey, Mary," began the Squire. "Not too much backing about it. Always remain on your former ground in curtseying; don't take one pace to the rear when you do it, you know. Tread on some one's toes and spoil the whole effect, eh? I remember when I was first presented to old Lady Wildmore, at the Basingstoke ball. She was so taken aback at meeting an attorney's son, and stood on her good manners to such an extent, that she made the lowest curtsey ever known, backed into the fireplace, and in rising brought her old head crack up under the mantelpiece. Well, and where the deuce have you been? Why didn't you come down to supper? What's the last news in the supernatural line?

Afraid of the dinner-table's saying anything unpleasant, eh?"

"No," said the Princess, with a charming laugh; "I was not at all afraid of the table's talking, unless it would have rapped out my age. If any table in the house were to betray that, I should take to table-turning on that table, and have the tables turned on it by turning it out of the house." She uttered this piece of simple nonsense so neatly, and with such an air of having said something uncommonly like Theodore Hook, that Arthur Silcote stood in his place for a minute or two, believing that the woman had rather a pretty wit.

"There she goes," said the Squire, "table-turning, turn the tables: turn the words over and over as often as you can manage, and you'll have a reputation for wit. Archy, how many muddy puns can you make out of three selected words, by your permutations and combinations, you know—hang it!—I forgot I sent you to Oxford; a Cambridge man would have told me. I don't find fault with you, Archy. But what a monstrous thing is this wit, this playing on words, which you young fellows admire so.—(I will not be quiet, Archy—she began it.)—Why, is it not the lowest effort

of the human intellect? though a man is better remembered for his tricks with words than for anything else in these rotten times. She comes here to pun me down, does she?"

"Father, you will talk yourself into a passion."

"Look at her dress, too. Her velvet and diamonds. Seven and twenty pounds for that dress, ordered expressly to meet her own nephew at dinner, and show off her beauty and her wit to *him*, who was only thinking that, if he had known how freely I would have bled, he would not have kept back those other bills, after he had given his word that he had told me of every penny. Do you wince, Tom? The same child, girl, woman, for fifty years."

It all went over her head without touching her. She only said, in her sweetest manner, "Silcote, my dear, you are in one of your scolding moods; and scold away. You know *my* temper by this time. But there is a boy here who has been hurt by the poachers, of whom the children have told me, who must be attended to. I have only come down for that boy. Let me have him."

"Where are the children?" asked Silcote, half ashamed.

"In Boothia Felix, as I understood them," said the Princess. "I proposed bed to them, but they refused it with scorn. It appears that they are playing a game, and have erected Esquimaux huts in the north gallery, in which they propose to sleep, and, in fact, are sleeping. I put it to them that the explorers always went to bed when they got back to civilization. The children have answered that they are still in the Arctic regions. I would not interfere with them on any account. Give me, however, this boy, and let me see to him. I will make it a personal favour to myself if the servants will see after him. Thank you, Arthur. Come along, my dear." And so she went off with James.

"Did you ever see such a fool as that woman?" asked the Squire, as soon as she was gone. "She pretends to take care of the house, and she has now let all those children go up and bivouac in the north gallery. They will catch their deaths. Arthur, go and see after them."

The Squire then went away, and the brothers were left alone together. "Does he often fly at her now?" asked Captain Silcote.

"More and more seldom as time goes on."

"She never gives it him back again, does she?"

"Never, even at the worst of times. She never replies, except in the most good-humoured manner, with a face covered with smiles. And she must feel it sometimes, you know."

"They are a curious pair," said the elder. "But I don't believe they could do without one another now."

CHAPTER V.

ABOUT THE SQUIRE.

Few lives ever opened more favourably and brilliantly than that of Henry Silcote, the man known in his neighbourhood as “the Dark Squire;” and, as it seemed, few were ending more uselessly, or more mournfully. It is necessary that I should give you some insight into it, and I think it is not uninteresting.

His father had been a great country attorney, agent for several very great houses, as *his* father had been before him; and was, of course, a very wealthy man. The largest of his agencies, however, was that of the enormously wealthy Sir George Denby, the great Hampshire squire, whose wealth, whose name, whose trees, and whose houses, are utterly passed away

and gone, leaving but a solitary elm and a barn to keep his name and his wrongs in the memory of man.

The estate was left to the eldest of his four daughters, who married the handsome and fascinating, but utterly unprincipled, Lord Ballyroundtower. In eleven years he had gambled away the whole of her forty thousand a year, principal, country houses, timber, everything but the bare land; and left her a penniless, broken-hearted woman, dependent on her three sisters.

Silcote's father acted as an honest and high-minded man from beginning to end of this miserable business. He used his influence with Sir George to prevent the match from being thought of; and after Sir George's sudden death he tried all he could to stay her infatuation for one of the most worthless men that ever lived. He prayed her to have, at least, some settlement made, but in vain. She proudly insisted on trusting the earl, and the result is well known. In eleven years her half-million of money gone, and she dying, in hiding, in the arms of her sister, in mortal terror lest her brutal

husband should discover her retreat, and renew his cruelties, even on her deathbed.

Old Silcote was none the richer for all this ruin. He loved the family and the property, and was probably the only honest man of business which the earl saw in those wild ten years. His wealth was fairly come by.

The fate of the other three sisters was much more fortunate. Old Silcote had induced Sir George Denby to provide for them handsomely and independently, and so they found themselves, after their sister's death and ruin, comfortably off, with nearly thirty thousand pounds a-piece ; but getting towards old maidenhood. They were very quiet little ladies, quite as good, quite as gentle, as that most unfortunate and ill-used lady, their sister, but a little more wise. The youngest of them married a clergyman of great eminence and piety, but sickly ; they had one little girl, who became heir to all their property.

She was very carefully brought up, both before her father's death, and afterwards. She turned out to be very pretty, gentle, and amiable ; but not

clever. Indeed, as time went on, her extreme simplicity of character gave their old friend Silcote great anxiety, and caused him to glance thoughtfully at his handsome young son Harry, as if thinking whether or no he would not make a better guardian of the ninety thousand pounds than the almost vacuous Laura Denby.

It was the most natural arrangement in the world, and it was brought about very easily. For many years Henry Silcote's father had been the intimate friend and adviser of the Miss Denbys; Henry had been in and out of the house as if it had belonged to him. Accordingly, just when he was called to the bar, when he was twenty-four and she nineteen, he announced that he had fallen in love with her. He spoke to the old people on the subject. A certain Sir Godfrey Mallory, who had been hitherto very much encouraged by the old ladies, now got his *conge*, and Henry Silcote took his place. He was clever, pushing, gentlemanly, rich; no spendthrift, but hard at work as a barrister, and, with his introductions to the profession, absolutely certain to succeed. They were married.

Even at this time, those who recollect him say that there was a frown upon his face, which, after his great misfortune, darkened into a scowl, which settled so permanently there that it appeared nothing could remove it. Even at that early time they say that it was a suspicious and watchful face, though very handsome.

They had a boy born, Algernon; and it was not very long before the three old ladies dropped off, leaving her alone in the world with Henry Silcote.

Her health was never good after her confinement, and after a long time, during which they lived perfectly happy, he consented to her going to Italy in company with his sister, the Princess, and a certain old Miss Raylock, a novelist, he waiting until term was over to join her. He went to meet her, and fetched her back. His manner towards her had entirely changed, and the expression of his face had grown very dark. Old friends saw, with infinite pity and concern, this poor, weak, delicately-nurtured lady, in her relations with her husband. He was so terribly, inexorably stern with her, and she looked at him so pitifully.

Things got worse and worse between them, and at last one of the few friends whom he allowed her to see declared that her reason would soon be unsettled. Things went on from bad to worse. At last a catastrophe came. Her sister and his wife were both with him at Exeter in the autumn, after their return from Italy. It is also absolutely certain that Sir Godfrey Mallory was there also ; as was also his sister's major-domo, courier, and friend, one Kreigsthurm.

At Exeter Silcote was defending a young sailor, who was charged with stabbing a Jew crimp. Silcote had been as brilliant as ever up to the time of the opening of his case, which was the last time any of his friends had speech of him. The case was interesting, and Silcote more splendid than he had ever been before.

He won his case, to every one's surprise. The terrified, deer-eyed sailor lad, who had kept those eyes fixed on Silcote all the morning, gave a gasp of relief at the astonishing effect of his counsel's eloquence. The judge, who had very properly summed up dead against the prisoner, looked at the jury as if admiration for that bulwark of our national liberties was not, at that moment, the prevailing sentiment of his mind.

Silcote's friends crowded round him congratulating; but he scarcely spoke a word to any of them. He left Exeter that day, with his wife, and was unheard of in the world for four years.

His sister had some very queer people around her, and so it was quite impossible to say who set afloat the story, which she persistently contradicted, but which every one believed, and which was never varied in the telling. The story was simply this, that Silcote had found out something very wrong about his wife and her former suitor, Sir Godfrey Mallory, and that he had bullied her to death in consequence. That was the story among the many, by which they accounted for his sudden retirement from the world, and her death, which followed, in Italy, close upon it. This was the story which had currency in the county among those who cared for Silcote and his affairs, until they got tired of them, and cared for them no longer.

But there was a still darker part of the story, only mentioned among a very few, and always discredited with scorn by any one who had ever known the unfortunate deceased Mrs. Silcote,—a story so dark and

so terrible, that it seemed to account in a credible manner for Henry Silcote's extraordinary conduct. The story was this: He had sulked so persistently and so inexorably with her, that she had lost her reason and attempted his life. It was only whispered among very few, and soon died out and was forgotten. It was monstrous, horrible, incredible; too much so to make a pleasant subject of gossip among those who had known her. It was soon dropped, even by the very few.

Old Mr. Silcote, meanwhile, shared the retirement of his son soon after the Exeter *esclandre*. There was something extremely wrong, and the hospitable, genial old man seemed to believe it. He lived for four years; at the end of which time his son Henry inherited Silcotes, and came back to live there, with another wife and son.

CHAPTER VI

ABOUT THE PRINCESS.

HE had married again! When, where, and to whom, nobody knew. It must have been unreasonably soon after his unhappy wife's death. Old Silcote, not long before her death, told Lady Ascot that there was a new mistress of Silcote and a new heir, and that the new bride was a lady of faultless character. That was all that was known. Consequently, when Silcote returned and took possession, she, the kindest and gentlest of women, at once called on the new Mrs. Silcote. Her visit was not returned, but her card was, without one word of explanation. The dark time at Silcotes had begun.

Dark in more ways than one, for there is no record of it at all save what may be gained from the testi-

mony of discharged servants, always untrustworthy. It seems, however, to go rather in favour of Silcote, for they agreed that he was habitually kind to his new wife, although she was never allowed to go beyond the grounds ; and, moreover, that she was a very foolish and good-natured woman, deeply attached to him, and fully persuaded that she had gained one of the great prizes in life. She had three children—Thomas, born in Italy ; Evelyn and Arthur, born at Silcotes ; after which she quietly departed this life, leaving no trace behind her save her children. “She was a person,” said Miss Raylock, the novelist, “whom it is very hard to remember. She died under the full impression that in marrying Henry Silcote, and getting locked up at Silcotes, she had accomplished the aim and object of her existence. Perhaps she had.”

This Miss Raylock, now very old, remembers Henry Silcote’s elder sister when a girl. “The poor Princess,” she says, “was at the same time the most beautiful and the most silly person I have ever seen. I think, also, that at the same time she was the kindest. Her taste in dress was very good, and showed itself even in the ridiculous dresses which we used to wear in those

times. She had a greed for jewellery which I have never seen equalled, and would have put a ring in her nose had such a thing been allowable. She was also very fond of reproducing her father's politics. I remember nothing more about her in the old times."

From other sources we know that she was a very beautiful, amiable, and silly girl, utterly spoilt by old Silcote, and held in affectionate contempt by her caustic brother Henry. Her father sent her into Austria and Italy for her education, and she got it there. Henry Silcote spoke to his father about this arrangement. "Mary is fool enough already," he said, "without learning the folly of Vienna and Florence. She will make a mess of it, I know she will."

She did. She got herself talked about in various ways before she was five-and-twenty, though a perfectly innocent woman. She was grossly indiscreet. When Henry Silcote came to fetch his wife home from Italy, he found her living in the midst of his sister's set,—enough to make any man suspicious. He shall himself tell this part of the story hereafter. We have but little to do with it at present.

At her father's death she found herself most hand-

somely provided for. She then resided almost entirely either in Vienna or in Italy ; and, in addition to numerous other follies, began dabbling in politics for the sake of the prestige which a rich and handsome woman gains by reproducing the opinions of well-versed politicians, and by adding to them the salt of feminine fierceness.

She now became acquainted with two men—one Kriegsthurm, her courier ; and the other, the Prince of Castelnuovo. Whether Kriegsthurm was the Prince of Castelnuovo's creature, or the Prince the courier's, we cannot tell. They both knew enough about one another, politically and socially, to make either situation possible. Castelnuovo was rich, however, and was prepared to make good settlements, and she was getting on in life. She married him, and became a princess disappointing her brother's prophecy that she would marry the courier.

Prince Castelnuovo and herself did not get on at all well together; and it is lamentable to add that Sir Godfrey Mallory persisted in living in Italy, unfortunately near the Princess. Her name to this day stands above all scandal, truly and honestly above

all scandal. Yet Sir Godfrey Mallory was her countryman and her old friend, and it pleased Castelnovo to be jealous.

Castelnovo was on the liberal Italian side. But in 1849 he went over to the Austrians, and sold his party. He not only did this, but he gave the liberal party the bitterest insult they had ever had. He carried with him to Vienna the Countess Frangipanni, the wife of one of the greatest of the Roman leaders. His desertion of the Italian cause was bad enough, after all that he had said and done, but the degradation of their noblest leader was more than they could bear. His name was a loathing to them, a name at which every honest Italian spat.

What did our poor Silcote Princess do, engaged as she was to the cause of Italian liberty? Denounce and repudiate her husband, who had put the bitter insult upon her? Strike in with a woman's tongue for the cause he had so basely deserted? Not at all. She forgave him, and followed him to Vienna.

The Italians therefore said that her account against him was not so great as his against her. They connected her name infamously, not only with that of

Sir Godfrey Mallory, but with that of her courier Kriegsthurm, who was tolerably known as a spy. One man, and one man only, stuck up for her a little while, and that man was Frangipanni, the great Roman leader: a man who would believe no evil. But he was silenced, when the hotter spirits proved to him that she had been consenting, for political purposes, to his own degradation.

Lost in character and in prestige as she was in Italy, she became great in Vienna; we shall see more of that hereafter.

Her husband died, and she had no children, although her heart was set on them. She loved children, and was tender to them, yet they were denied her. As is generally the case with affectionate women who have no children, she fell in love with one particular child; and that child was her brother Silcote's eldest child by his second marriage, Thomas. She had fallen in love with this nephew of hers, in a flying visit to Silcote, years before 1849. Indeed in 1849 Tom Silcote had grown up, and had become dissipated and extravagant; although she had not felt his extravagance as yet. It is difficult to tell why she loved

him so well, yet, as one of the keys to the story, we must mention the fact before we have done with this sketch of her earlier history.

Massimo, Prince of Castelnuovo, died in 1850, after which she returned to England for a long time each year, which time she spent at her brother's house. She pensioned Kriegsthurm, and, whenever she went on the continent, travelled no farther south than Vienna. Enough of her for the present.

CHAPTER VII.

ALGERNON.

HENRY SILCOTE, already introduced as the “Dark Squire,” had a child by his first wife, christened Algernon. That child was represented first of all by a baby, whose specialities were that he was rather paler than babies in general, and had large eager scared eyes ; that he took notice sooner than most babies, but kept such deductions as he had made from ascertained facts entirely to himself, refusing to reduce them to practice until he had verified them further ; and so, consequently, at three years of age, was the most left-handed unlucky child to be found, one would guess, for miles round. Not at all a healthy child ; a child who did really require a sensible doctor to look after him ; who came, by the mother’s side, from a family who believed in doctors, and got

physicked and drugged accordingly : and the best child for taking medicine ever seen. Indeed, medicine in some form soon became a necessity to him, and, later in life, the principal part of his mild pecuniary embarrassments had their origin in this necessity.

When he was very young, his mother died, and he never saw his father after this. Gradually he developed into a pale, good child, easily kept quiet, easily made to cry ; very thoughtful apparently, but keeping his thoughts strictly to himself. Then he became a pale, leggy boy, a great favourite at school, working very hard, but getting no prizes except those for good conduct, which were always given to him without question or hesitation. Then there was a lanky youth who stayed at school late, until he became grandfather of the sixth, in a tail coat and stand-up collars.

Then he grew into the gentlest and best of freshmen to a somewhat fast college : who, although slow, religious, and of poor health and peaceful habits, gained a sort of half-respectful half-pitying affection from the strongest and the wildest : more particularly after he had, mildly but quite firmly, before a whole common room, refused to give any information whatever con-

cerning the ringleaders at a bonfire, which had been made under his window, and which he confessed to have witnessed. The men waited outside hall and cheered him that evening. Those wild young spirits, who had only a week before prised open his oak with a coal hammer at midnight, nailed him into his bed-room, broken his tea-things, and generally conducted themselves as our English youth do when anything abnormal, and consequently objectionable, comes in their way now made full amends by coming to him in a body, and telling him that it was they who had done it, but that they didn't know he was a brick ; beyond which what could any gentleman desire in the way of satisfaction ? He got on with them. Many will remember the way in which he, too gentle to denounce, would quietly and silently leave the company when the brilliancy of the conversation got a little too vivid for him, and men got fast and noisy. He was in the confidence of all in his second year. When the elder Bob got his year's rustication, it was up and down Algy Silcote's room that he walked, with scared pale face, consulting him as to how the terrible news was to be broken to the governor. When Bob's little brother, the idle, gentle little favourite

of the college, got plucked for his little-go, he bore up nobly before the other fellows, who wisely handed him over to Old Algy ; and on Algy's sofa the poor boy lay down the moment they were alone together, and wept without reserve or hesitation. So he took his modest pass degree, and leaving, to the sorrow of every one, from the master to the messenger, was ordained one Trinity Sunday, having a small London curacy for title.

During the three happy years he had spent in concluding his education, he had had but few visitors. He was the only quiet man in St. Paul's, and quiet and mild men of other colleges were nervous about coming to tea with him in that den of howling and dangerous lunatics. The lodge alone, with its crowd of extravagantly-dressed men in battered caps and tattered gowns, who stared and talked loudly and openly of illegal escapades, who rowed in the University eight,—ay, and got first-classes in the schools, too, some of them, the terrible fellows—was too much for these heroes. They used to pass, quickly and shuddering, that beautiful old gateway, until the shouting of the encaged spirits became mellowed by distance : wondering what could

possibly have induced Silcote's "friends" to send him to such a college. But they always greedily listened to Algy's account of the terrible affairs which were carried on in that dreadful place. And indeed Algy was not sorry to recount them ; for the conversation of the set to which his religious principles had driven him was often wearisomely dull, and sometimes very priggish and ill-conditioned. There were but four or five of them as earnest and good as himself, and the others palled on him so in time, with the prate of books they bought and never read, and of degrees they never took, that sometimes, in coming back late to that abode of mad fantastic vitality and good humour called St. Paul's College, he seemed to feel that he was going where he had never been—home ; and was about to get a welcome—mad enough, but sincere.

So Algy had no more than two out-college visitors all the time he was there, and they were wonderful favourites in the place. Algy's brothers were such great successes that the brightness which overspread his face on their arrival communicated itself to many others.

They were so utterly unlike him. The first a splendid young cornet of dragoons, up to anything, bound to

uphold the honour of the army by being so much faster than anybody else that it became necessary for the Vice Chancellor to communicate with the colonel of his regiment, to the intense delight and admiration of the Paul's men, and the deep horror of poor Algy. But, in spite of Tom's naughtiness, Tom was dearer to his half-brother Algy than anything else in this world, and the boy dragoon, though he was fond of teasing and shocking Algy, was as fond of him as he could be of anything.

The other brother and visitor was a very different person. A handsome, bright-eyed, eager youth from Eton, with an intense vivid curiosity and delight in everything, as if the world, which was just opening before him, was a great and beautiful intellectual problem, which unfolded and got more beautiful as each fresh piece of knowledge and each fresh piece of experience was gained : at one time in a state of breathless delight and admiration at hearing some man pass a splendid examination ; then rapt in almost tearful awe at the anthem at Magdalen ; then madly whooping on the tow-path. Such were some of the moods which expressed themselves in the noble open face of Arthur

during these precious visits to his brother. In its quieter moments, in the time of its most extreme repose, this face had the look of one thinking earnestly. If people began to talk, the lad sat perfectly still, but turned his keen eyes on each speaker in turn as he spoke, without any change of feature ; but, if anything touched or interested him in the conversation or argument, his eyebrows would go up, and his mouth lengthen into a smile. A boy too proud to applaud where he did not feel, but applauding eagerly enough where he did.

The good and gentle Algernon had never, to his recollection, seen his father, or been home. His father—although providing well, almost handsomely, for him until he got other provision—steadily refused to set eyes on him, although he allowed his half-brothers, by his second marriage, to be friends with him. Algy never really had a home, until he got the one in which we shall see him directly.

He could remember his mother—just remember a gentle kind face, not in the least like (his honesty compelled him to say) the ivory miniature in his possession. He could remember his Aunt Mary, as she

was at that time. He could remember very well a splendid officer of Horse Guards Red, Sir Godfrey Mallory, who used to be much with his mother and his aunt; but he could not quite decide if he had ever seen the father who had so steadily and so strangely refused to see him—the father whom he heard mentioned once or twice by young fellows at St. Paul's, who came from Berkshire, as the "Dark Squire." He could not remember whether he had ever seen him; but he could call up a certain scene at any time by night or day. His Aunt Mary, his mother, and Sir Godfrey Mallory, were together in the drawing-room, and he was playing on the carpet, when there come in a scowling, wild-looking man, who said something which passed over the ears of childhood unheeded, but which made terrible havoc amongst the others. All he could remember was that his Aunt Mary scolded all parties till she fell into hysterics, that Sir Godfrey drew himself up, and scornfully exasperated the dark-looking intruder by withering words, until the latter struck the former, and, in an undignified and disgraceful struggle, threw him violently to the ground, but the servants and grooms came in and separated them; and that all this time his

mother, having caught him up, held him close to her on the sofa, and, when it was all over, and they were gone, continued to tremble so, that he, poor little fool, thought she must be cold, and tried to cover her with some bauble of a rug which lay on the couch. He could remember all this; it was all that his childish recollection could retain; and he used to ask himself, "Was the dark-looking man who came in and beat Sir Godfrey my father?" It was his father. Though he remembered his striking Sir Godfrey, he neither understood, nor remembered, the false words with which the blow was accompanied, until they were explained.

There came a time very soon after, he tells us in his simple way, when they told him he could not go to his mother, for she was too ill to see him; and very soon after a time when his Aunt Mary (a kind woman, with all her faults) came to him, and gently told him that he would not see his mother any more. "I took it from her lips like gospel," Algy says in his simple way. "I didn't know she was dead. I didn't know what death was at that time. She said I was never to see my mother any more, and it was the same as a bit of catechism or creed to me; I always believe what is

told me. I should believe anything you told me. And I believed her. I did not try to go to my mother, for I believed my aunt's statement implicitly. The reason I cried myself into a fever is, that I felt that dreadful sense of utter loneliness and desertion which a child can feel and live, but which drives a full-grown man to the lunatic asylum or to suicide. They took me to kiss her in her coffin, sir, and I complained to them about her dress. Allow me to call your attention to the fact that the most perfect ballad in the English language is built on the neglect and desolation of two children."

His curacy was in a rapidly-increasing neighbourhood in the north of London. When he was first ordained the place was a wilderness of scaffold-poles and gravel-pits, with here and there a fragment of a field-hedge, or some country cottage, looking very small and very old among the new houses lying round in all directions; not, however, that the new houses were of any vast size, for the neighbourhood was decidedly a middle-class one, composed of thirty or forty pound houses. Before he had been two years in the curacy, Lancaster Square, composed of just such houses, was

finished, and the church at one end had been built also in all the native hideousness of the period. What with pew-rents, Easter-dues, and what not, the stipend of the church would reach at least, one way with another, 300*l.*—a large income for those parts, giving the incumbent that prestige which it is so necessary for a clergyman of the Establishment to have. There was no doubt who was to have it. The bishop inducted the Rev. Algernon Silcote, to the satisfaction of every one who knew him, from Monseigneur Gray to Mr. Hoxworth, the Baptist minister.

Very few clergymen, at all events, then, hesitated to marry upon 300*l.* a year, and to Algernon Silcote, with his modest habits, it seemed to be a very fine income. Mr. Betts, one of the wealthiest men in those parts, a stockbroker, had been the principal subscriber to the testimonial which he had received when he had quitted the curacy; Miss Betts (his only daughter) and he had a mutual admiration for one another, and so they married, and he bade farewell to all hopes of comfort for the future.

She was a foolish woman, an only daughter, pretty, gentle, and utterly spoiled and ignorant. Whether it

was his voice, his position, or his preaching, which made her fall in love with this gaunt young curate, it is impossible to say ; but she admired him, and gave him every opportunity of falling in love with her. He did so, and to his astonishment and delight, for the first time in his life, found that one woman honoured him by a preference above all other men. Some of the young fellows of those parts, who were just getting on so far in life as to think of settling, expressed their discontent at a parson, with half their income, carrying off the best match thereabouts, not reflecting that Algernon discounted his position as a gentleman, and education, for a large sum. In a year's time, however, they congratulated one another on their escape.

She had certainly brought with her an allowance of 150*l.* a year, but she was so extravagant, so useless, and so silly, that it was worse than nothing. She was confined just as the sudden shock of her father's bankruptcy came on them. From this time to the day of her death, the poor woman was only a fearfully-expensive incumbrance.

The bankrupt father was instantly and promptly received into his house, by Algernon himself, with

a most affectionate welcome. If there was one man more than another to whom he was polite and deeply respectful, it was to this suddenly broken man, whom he had made, by his own act, an ever-present burden to himself. Mr. Betts was vulgar, loud, ostentatious, selfish, and not too honest; but he was in distress, and Algernon, simple fellow, knew only of one Gospel.

Algernon's health had never been good, and now his wife worried him into a state of permanent dyspepsia, or whatever they call that utter lowering of the system which arises from worry and anxiety, as well as from laziness and over-feeding. She worried herself to death after her fourth confinement, and left him slightly in debt, with a household from which anything like comfort and management had been banished five years before.

But it was home to them. They contrived to keep their muddle and untidiness to themselves: He was always well-dressed on Sunday, and, since his misfortunes had begun, his sermons had acquired a plaintive and earnest beauty which they might have lacked before. The more weary life grew to him, the more earnest—sometimes the more fiercely eager—he got,

on one point—the boundless goodness and mercy of God. He gained power with his people. The very extreme party, both in and beyond the Established Church, allowed him great unction. His church was full, but there was but a limited number of sittings; and his four children were growing, and must be educated. So it came about that home became home to him no longer—that it became necessary for him to give up his last and only luxury, privacy. It became necessary for him to take pupils.

It was his father-in-law Betts who pointed out to him this method of increasing his income. Betts was a bad specimen of the inferior kind of the London City speculator. He had all his ostentation, his arrogance, his coarseness, his refusal to recognise high motives (in which latter characteristic your peasant and your town mechanic are so often far superior to the man who leads him), while he was without his *bonhomie*, and his ready-handed careless generosity. Neither ostentation nor real careless goodwill could ever make him subscribe liberally ; the only large subscription he ever gave was that to Algernon's, to his prospective son-in-law's, testimonial ; not a very nice man, by

any means, a man who seemed to Algernon with his Oxfordism entirely made up of faults with no virtues, a man who grated on his dearest prejudices a hundred times a day, a man sent him for his sins. The horror of his being a bankrupt, the horror of anything connected with dear noisy old St. Paul's having gone into the Bankruptcy Court, was enough to make him renounce all communion with his old friends, and keep himself with lofty humility from the world; but after this, the man himself remained on his hands, a deadly thorn in his side, annoying him all day long by his manners, his way of eating even, his everlasting allusion to his losses, and, more than all, by his clumsy expressions of gratitude, "the more offensive," said Arthur, who had not then been quite cured of priggishness, "because they are sincere."

Betts's very numerous faults were more those of education and training than of nature; for if one cannot believe that some natures are more difficult to spoil than others, and that the *whole* business is a mere result of the circumstance of a man's bringing up, one would be getting near to believe nothing at all. The man's nature was not

a bit changed because Algernon in his treatment of him scrupulously followed the directions given in the Sermon on the Mount. His nature remained the same, but all his old landmarks of riches and respectability had been swept away by his bankruptcy, and immediately after he saw, with his eyes cleared from all cobwebs, while in a state of humiliation, a man who acted on a law he had never recognised, hardly ever heard of: the pure law of Christianity. Not that he ever fully recognised the fact: perhaps he was too old. To the very last, while alluding to Algernon, he would say, "Sir, my son-in-law is the most perfect gentleman I ever saw, and a sincere Christian, sir. Yes, sir, a most sincere Christian, I give you my honour."

When Algernon, for the first time in his life, found that he was actually pushed for money; when he found that the weekly bills were increasing, without the means of paying them; that, although Reginald might be kept from school a little longer, yet his darling eldest born, Dora, was growing vulgar, and imitating in her talk the maids, with whom she spent four-fifths of the day, instead of him, with whom she

spent about one-fifth; then he thought it time to consult his father-in-law, whose knowledge of the world, he put it to him, might be most valuable.

"You see," he said "that I am a mere child; I really am. Such small intellectual vigour as I possess" (he used this style of talk to Betts: he would have spoken very differently to a university man) "is used up by my sermons. I ask you—you will smile at my simplicity—what does a man in my position do to increase his income?"

"Are you quite sure," said Mr. Betts, somewhat huskily, "that you would do better *by* increasing your income?"

"It is absolutely necessary, I fear, my dear sir," said Algernon. "I must have a good governess for Dora. Our confidence is mutual, I believe, and I cannot conceal from you the fact that, unless Dora has some lady to superintend her education—well, I will cut it short—in fact she will not grow up a lady herself."

"Who the deuce wants her to be a lady? She won't have any money."

"My dear sir——"

"I brought up my girl for a lady, and she was no good, at least to you. I don't believe in girls, without one tithe of the prospects she had when you married her, being brought up as ladies. Governessing ain't any good, I tell you—they never make one and a half per cent. on the money spent on their education; and the flower-making ain't much good now. They say the women are going to take to the law writing, but a friend of mine in the business says they'll never come to it. Try that. But, Lord! see the various games I have tried to make a little money, and ease you. And see my success. I am a burden on you still."

"You are no burden, my dear friend. Even if you ever had been, you could repay the whole of your obligation by pointing out to me the way to increase my income. I *must* have my children educated as gentlemen and ladies, and Reggy *must* go to school."

"Must he? *I* never went to school, but here I am, say you. Well, I won't dispute; but, knowing what I do know, I'd apprentice him to a smith. Look here: your education cost two thousand pounds, first and last, and I don't deny that the investment

was a good one. Three hundred a year for two thousand *is* a good investment. But then your friends had the money, and you turned out well, and you had luck in getting this church; whereas, in the case of Reggy, you ain't got the money, and he may turn out bad (which is deuced likely), and you nor no other man can be answerable for his luck. Therefore, I say, apprentice him to the smith's trade."

"I could not dream of such a thing."

"Of course you couldn't. You're a gentleman, and I'll speak up for gentlemen as long as I live. But gentlemen—I mean such as you—never do any good for themselves: you know swells, don't you?"

"Do you mean noblemen?"

"Of course I do."

"Yes, I know a few noblemen; I think I know a good many noblemen. At Paul's we were very intimate with Christchurch, and I was popular in both places; but what then?"

"Why, this: why do you send these swells away when they seek you? Why, the day before yesterday, while I was at the parlour window, and you

in your study, up comes the Marquis of Bangor, hunting you out as if you were a fox. And you gave him 'Not at home;' and I heard him say, 'Dash it all, I should like to find him again,' or something of that sort. And I went to the stationer's, and hunted him up in the Peerage. Patron of nine livings. And I got the Clergy List, and I found two of the incumbents instituted before Waterloo; and then you come to ask me how to increase your income. Three words of common civility to Lord Bangor would make you a rich man."

"Yes, but," said Algernon, "you see I couldn't say them—more particularly now you have told me that two of his livings are likely to drop in. Don't you see?"

Betts couldn't see that at all.

"I'll try to explain. I used to know Lord Bangor as an equal. It became my painful duty on one occasion to rebuke Lord Bangor, openly and publicly, for speaking in a way which I did not approve of. I never did so to any other man, for my custom was to leave the room when talk began to get fast and wild. That he has respected me ever since is

nothing. Is this the man to whom you would have me go and truckle for a living?"

"I can't understand this sort of thing," said Betts.
"But you are familiar with other noblemen."

"I am not familiar with any. I cannot bring them here; I cannot."

"Well, you know best," said Betts. "I thought swells were swells, and were to be used accordingly. Otherwise, what is the good of them? If you are going in this line, *you* must take pupils. There is the Rev. George Thirlwall takes three, at two hundred a year a piece. There's six hundred for you, barring their keep."

"Yes; but then Thirlwall was a Balliol scholar, and got a double first. He can command such a price. I doubt, as a mere pass man, whether I should get any pupils at all."

"But his education did not cost any more than yours."

"Rather less, I should think. He got his scholarship and his fellowship. I never got anything better than a good-conduct prize. I have not the brains."

"That's a rum thing," pondered Betts aloud. "He

ain't half such a good fellow as you, and a stick in the pulpit. Hang education, I say. I don't see my way to the interest on my money. And I've been a bold man, too—too bold, as your pocket can tell for this many a year, sir. It was the Illinois Central finished me at last, but the Illinois Central seems to me safe alongside of a university education. However, if you are bent against the law writing and blacksmithing, and against the using of swell friends, so strong, you must try for pupils. Unless——”

“Unless what?”

“Unless you would try your father, sir.”

“I tried him long ago,” said Algernon.

“And it didn't do?”

“Oh, dear no; not in the least. Far from it.”

CHAPTER VIII.

PAR NOBILE FRATRUM.

ALGERNON's modest allowance of 250*l.* a year had been continued through the usual channel, all through the time of his curacy, but, when he entered on the duties of his incumbency, he was informed by his father's lawyer that it would be discontinued. He submitted, with a sigh, without remonstrance or remark, and gave up all hope of assistance from that quarter. It was not that he proudly made any resolution against accepting it; it merely seemed to him utterly improbable that such help would ever be offered, and utterly impossible that he should ever ask for it.

But many apparent impossibilities have been done for the sake of children. When he began to see that

he was poor, and getting poorer, the thought of their future was quite enough to set aside any lingering feelings of pride or fear, had any such been there. He put his case through his lawyer, and was refused. Old Silcote wished it to be understood that he could hold no further communication with Mr. Algernon Silcote.

Once, not long after this, the children fell ill of measles, or some childish disorder, and a sad time the poor widower had with them, and was still thanking God that they were on the mend, and that he had lost none of his precious little incumbrances, when a message came from Silcotes, ordering the children to be sent there for change of air, until they recovered their health. The message came through Silcote's lawyer, and was given in as ill-conditioned a manner as need be, but Algernon had no "proper spirit" whatever. He thankfully sent the children off, and they were kept there for above two months. He was very thankful. "The ban then is not to descend to the next generation," he said. He thanked God for it.

The younger of his two visitors at Oxford, the bright-eyed young Arthur, now grown to be the man we

saw him at Silcotes the night of the poaching affray, paid him frequent visits as of yore. It was he who brought the children back from Silcotes, with new clothes, new toys, new roses in their cheeks, and, alas, new wants and a new discontent at the squalid and untidy home to which they had returned. Arthur, who noticed everything, noticed Miss Dora turning up her nose at several things, and heard one or two petulant remarks from her in strong disparagement of the *ménage* at No. 20, Lancaster Square; and he said with his usual decision, "I shall stay a few days with you, Algy. Dora, you are tired with your journey, and consequently cross and disagreeable. Go to bed. No, leave your doll here. I want it."

Dora obeyed, reddening. "I'll stay a day or two, and whip these children in. They have been most awfully spoilt by that very foolish aunt of ours. You will require the aid of my influence for a short time, until hers has become a thing of the past. What a noble child that Dora is! Every element of good about her. She has a will, and requires to have it controlled by a stronger one. But she is a sweet child."

"Dora," said Algernon, with perfect good faith, "reminds me, in all her ways, of her mother."

Arthur was just going to rap out in his short way, "Lord forbid." But he neither did that, nor what he felt inclined to do a moment afterwards—burst out laughing: he was getting that tongue of his under command by now.

"Well, she is a very sweet child, and Reggy is another. Reggy is an artist. Reggy will do great things in art. Reggy will be a Royal Academician, if those old dunderheads can ever be got to overcome their inveterate jealousy against anything approaching to talent and originality."

Algry answered in commonplaces, not quite knowing what words he was uttering, for he was confusedly wondering how an undergraduate could have such wonderful intuition about an art of which he was entirely ignorant, as to see a future Royal Academician in a child of nine, whose efforts hitherto had been certainly below the average. But it was only Arthur, he thought again with a smile,—Arthur the omniscient.

Arthur went on. "I love and admire everything

you do, but I never admired you more than when you gave up your pride, and allowed these children to pay this visit."

"I have no pride, Archy," said Algernon. "And, if I had, I could not display it in that quarter."

Arthur looked at him keenly, and asked, "Why?"

"I cannot tell you."

"Do you mean on general grounds—on the ground that you have no right to be proud to your own father—or that you have no right to stand in your children's light? Or are there other grounds for your not being proud?"

"The reasons," said Algernon, "on which I acted in sending my children to their grandfather at Silcotes were just such as you have suggested: that I had no right to be proud to my own father, and that I should be wicked to stand in my children's light. You asked me then if there were other reasons why I should show no pride in that quarter. I answer that there are. We must understand one another, at least partially, my dearest Arthur, even if that partial understanding aids in our separation. I know that it is to your good offices that I owe this recognition of

my children. Utter the question which I see hanging on your lips."

"I'll utter it, Algy, though all the powers of the Inferno shall never make me believe in you as anything but the best man who ever walked. Here it is. Did you, before Tom or I remember, ever—well—make a fiasco?"

"Never! To you I will say the simple truth. Though I'm not strong in brain, and have that want of energy which comes from habitual ill-health, yet I have lived as blameless a life as any of us poor sinners can hope to lead."

"Then what has caused this terrible injustice of my father towards you?"

"He has not been unjust. He has been most generous. Question on, and let us have it out."

"Has his extraordinary treatment of you arisen from any facts in connexion with your mother?"

"Yes. I will now finish this conversation, and we will never resume it. I was put in possession of certain facts when I was seventeen. Now ask yourself, but never ask me, what has made me

grey at six-and-thirty, and has produced in my father that never-ending thought about self, and distrust of others, which has made him very little better than a lunatic."

CHAPTER IX.

MISS LEE.

ON this occasion Arthur pointed out to Dora what he was pleased to call the extreme meanness of her conduct towards her father, in making disparaging comparisons between his house and her grandfather's. Dora received her scolding with perfect composure and silence, replying not one word, but looking steadily at him with her hands behind her back. Though she did not confess her fault, yet she never repeated it. Their visits to Silcotes took place every year after this. The old man ordered it, and every one obeyed ; but Dora, honest little story-teller as she was, always, on her return home, used audibly to thank Heaven that she was back in her own place once more, and to vilipend and ridicule the whole *ménage* of Silcotes most entirely.

The other children used generally to roar all through the night after their return, and to be unmanageable for the next week.

Two pupils were got—dough-faced foolish youths, who had made so little use of their schooling that their matriculation examination was considered more than doubtful, and so they were, with the wisdom of some parents, taken from experienced hands at school, and sent into the inexperienced hands of Algernon. That he did his duty by them, and got them through, I need not say; but it was on the strength of these pupils that he engaged a governess.

Miss Lee was a foolish Devonshire young person, whose father had been a clergyman, and, as she always averred, kept hounds. She also held up her head, as being a cousin of Mr. Lee of Basset, whose wealth her imagination compared favourably with that of Silcote. The hounds were quite possible, for he left her destitute, and with no education, and so it became necessary for her to go out as a governess. She was not in the least fit for it, and Algernon, of course, could only offer the most modest stipend. So they naturally came together from the extreme ends of England. Miss

Lee, in addition to the disqualifications of ignorance and not very refined manners, had another disqualification, considered in some families, and for good reason, to be greater than either of the others. She, like so many Devonshire girls, was amazingly beautiful.

Such, in the main, and given as shortly as possible, so as to avoid being duller than was necessary, is the information I had gained from Miss Raylock, Arthur, Algernon, and others, about the Silcote family, as they were at the time of the children's third visit—the time of the poaching raid described in the first chapter. This coincided with the fourth time that Captain Tom Silcote had got leave of absence from duty, for the purpose of coming home, and representing one-half of his debts as the whole, and, with a sort of recollection of his Catechism, promising to lead a new life, and be in charity with all men. The debts which he confessed to his father were always paid—for was not he the heir? and he always went back to lead the old life over again, and to hate his unsatisfied creditors with all the hatred of a gentleman living habitually beyond his means.

CHAPTER X.

THE SQUIRE INVADES MRS. SUGDEN'S TERRITORY, AND GETS BEATEN.

BOISEY is a great sheet of rolling woodland four or five miles square, which in two points, close together, heaves itself up so high as to be a landmark for several counties. The greater, and all the highest part of it, is unbroken beech forest ; but, as you come lower, it begins to get broken open by wild green lanes, tangled fantastically at their sides by bramble, sweet briar, wild rose, and honeysuckles, by which a few solitary cottages stand here and there ; picturesque cottages generally, standing alone, and not stinted for garden ground. As you get lower the fields become more frequent and larger, and you are among farms, generally embosomed in dense clusters of dark and noble elms ; below this

steep fields stoop suddenly down to the level of the broad river meadows, and around three-fifths of the circle winds the Thames—by day a broad river of silver; in some evenings, when the sun has just sunk behind the dark dim wolds of Oxfordshire, a chain of crimson pools.

Dim mysterious wolds are those of Oxfordshire across the river; rolling, hedgeless, uncultivated chalk down, capped always by the dark level bars of woodland: a land of straight though somewhat lofty lines, with no artistic incident for miles, in strong contrast to the fantastic prettiness of the elm hedgerows of the neighbouring Berkshire. A very melancholy piece of country, almost as melancholy as some of the warren lands in Norfolk, or one suspects of Lincolnshire, else why did a Lincolnshire man write—

“ When from the dry dark wold the summer airs blow cool
On the oat grass and the sword grass, and the bulrush in the pool? ”

—two of the most beautiful and melancholy lines in our language, more than worthy of Wordsworth. A lonely, dim-looking county that Oxfordshire, as that dreaming little shepherd lad, James Sugden, saw it

month after month, year after year, in his solitary watch over the sheep among the highest fields of the beautiful Boisey, or from the door of his father's cottage, highest up among the towering beechwood, when merry haymaking and merrier harvest were over, and the September sun was blazing down due west.

The boy had got some considerable education. Educate a boy loosely, and set him to tend sheep, and, if he does not develop his imaginative powers, you may be pretty sure he has not got any. This boy was imaginative enough for a poet; only he wanted wits and application, without which no poet or any one else can possibly do anything, and he used to dream about these Oxfordshire wolds. To his left, as he sat at his father's door, was a view much more interesting than the one towards Oxfordshire; Reading, six miles off, lay almost at his feet, and, above the towers and the smoke, on a clear day, rose a dim blue mountain, crowned with dark trees; Siddon, his mother told him, at whose bases lived Lord P—— and Lord C——, greater lords than Lord A——, almost as great as the ultimate lord of the great hanging woods of Clevedon. All this was very fine, but he always preferred the deso-

late wolds to the west, more particularly after his father had told him one evening, in confidence, when they were eating their poor supper together in the garden, under the falling dew and the gathering night, that just beyond those darkening wolds lay the most beautiful city in the whole world.

"How far off?" asked the boy.

"Fifteen mile, across through Ipsden. A matter of eight and twenty by Benson and Dorchester."

"It isn't Seville, is it? Of course it is not. But Seville is the finest town in the world."

"Oxford beats it hollow, I tell you."

"Have you seen them both?"

"Yes. Leastways, I know one on 'em well, and that's quite enough to give me a right to speak. If you want to know both sides of a question before you speaks about it, everlasting dumbness will be your portion. Whatever you've got to say, old fellow, rap it out, hard and heavy, and see what the other fellow has got to say. If he has the best of it, give in; if he hasn't, shut him up. But don't believe that you are in the right, for all that; only believe that he is a greater fool than you. So you see, old fellow, I say

again that Oxford is a finer town than the one you named. We'd best get to bed, old chap, hadn't we?"

Looking from the door of his father's cottage, he could see the top of the chimneys of Silcotes below him among the trees. A fine old place, Silcotes, say 1650, a foursquare place of endless gables of brick—the great addition made by the present squire's father (who may almost be said to have built it over again) being in perfect harmony with the old seventeenth century nucleus which he found. These additions had been made so long, that the newer bricks, with the assistance of cunning washes, had toned down to the colour of the older building, so that it required an architect's eye to tell new from old. A most harmonious house—for, in fact, the elder Silcote's architect, with a taste rare in those later years of that century, had carefully and painfully fulfilled the original design of the seventeenth century architect, whose work had probably been stopped by the Revolution, and who may, before he patched up and finished, have heard the cannonading from old Basing House, booming up from the S.W. from behind Bearwood.

It was a very beautiful place, and very beautifully

kept up. If you went into the stables you would see the master's eye, or his stud-groom's eye, in the very straw plait which edged the litter; a Dunstable bonnet was only a slight improvement on it. If you went to the other end of the *ménage*, if you went to look round the flower-garden, you would see the managing eye there also; terrace after terrace of the newest and finest flowers—lobelias, calceolarias, geraniums, and what not—piling themselves up in hideous incongruous patterns, until, in their sheer confusion, they became almost artistic; and then, above all, the great terrace of roses, which flushed up with nearly a year-long beauty, and then, clinging to the house itself, hung the deep dark porch, the only solecism in the house, with festoons of *Jaune d'Espray*, and *Dundee Rambler*, and, ever climbing, hung magnificent trophies of *Blairii No. 2*, and *Gloire de Dijon*, at every coign of vantage in the long façade.

"Six thousand a year in housekeeping, and no company worthy of being so called ever seen." That was what the Princess of Castelnuovo used to tell Miss Raylock, and the Princess should have known, for she was housekeeper. About the "company" she

was undoubtedly right; with regard to the six thousand a year, why you must generally divide that lady's statements by two, and then be very careful to examine closely the facts on which was based the remaining half of her assertion. There is, however, no doubt that this fine house of Silcotes, even in these dark times, was kept up with amazing liberality; and the very servants who left it of their own accord would tell you, almost pathetically, that they had never had anything to complain of, and that there was not such a servants' hall as Silcote's for miles round.

For, in spite of the liberality of Silcote's house-keeping, servants would not stay with him. There was no society and no change,—things which servants desire even more than good living. If you think that the footman in plush breeches, or the groom in white, is a mere machine, you are mistaken. If you think that the mere paying of these men's wages, and feeding them well, will secure these men, you are again mistaken. My lord or the squire cannot destroy these men's individuality, when they dress them in the clothes of the eighteenth century. Necessity may keep them quiet; good living and gaiety may keep them

contented; but if they get bored, they will "better" themselves as sure as possible, even at lower wages, and worse beer.

However, Silcote's servants never stayed. Their formula was, "that a man was not sent into the world to die of the blues," and I am sorry to say that in self-justification they set abroad, through the county, an account of the Dark Squire's eccentricities a great deal darker than the mere truth.

The ultimate fate of little James Sugden, on the night of the poaching affray, was this. The Princess had him plastered and mended as far as was possible, and then, having done her "possible," handed him over to the butler, who proceeded towards the men's quarters to see if he could get him a bed.

Those who were asleep were immovable, and those who were awake objected so very strongly, and in such extremely pointed language, that he did not dare to push his point; at last, getting tired of argument, he used his authority where he dared, and quartered him on the youngest stable-boy. At sunrise James was on the alert, dressed, and ready to make his escape home.

Which was the way, and where were the dogs? His

companion told him the way, but could give no information about the dogs. They might be still loose: *he* would not venture beyond the stable yard for ten pounds till he knew they were kennelled. But the intense wish the boy had to be at home again overcame his fears, and he resolved to go. He had all the dislike which a dog or a child has, at first, to strange faces and places, and he dreaded seeing any folks in authority for fear they should bid him stay, in which case he knew he must obey. He fled. One terrible fright he had; he opened a door in the wall, and, when he had shut it behind him, he found himself alone among the bloodhounds. His terror was simply unutterable at this moment; but the dogs knew him, and proposed to come with him, and he, afraid to drive them back, was escorted by them as far as a gate, beyond which they would not come. Once out of sight of them, he sped away through the forest hard towards his home.

It was late in the day when he was sitting between his father and mother, looking out over the little garden of potatoes and cabbage, of filbert and apple trees, towards the westering sun over the Oxfordshire

wolds. Their poor flowers were mostly fading by now, and the garden looked dull; for cottagers' flowers are mostly spring flowers. In the lengthening evenings of early spring, the sight of Nature renewing herself has its effect on the poorest of the hinds, to a certain extent, and in their dull way they make efforts at ornamentation, perhaps because they have some dim hope that the coming year cannot be quite so hopeless as the one gone past—will not be merely another milestone towards chronic rheumatism and the workhouse. They must have such hopes, poor folks, or they would madden. These hopes come to them in the spring, with reviving nature, and then they garden. The wearied hind stays late out in the cool brisk April night, and spares a little time, after he has done delving in his potatoes, to trimming and planting a few poor flowers. But after, when Nature gets productive and exacting, she absorbs him, and the flowers are neglected; only a few noble perennials, all honour to their brave hearty roots,—your lilies and your hollyhocks, and latterly, I am pleased to see everywhere, your *Delphinium formosum*—standing bravely up amidst the forced neglect. So Sugden's garden, this

bright September afternoon, was not sufficiently gaudy to keep James's eye from wandering across the little green orchard beyond the well, on to the distant hill.

Suddenly his father, badly hurt, and still in pain, grew animated. "By Job," he said, "there's the deer! There she goes. Hi! look at her! There she goes into the Four Acre, making for Pitcher's Spinney. She'll go to soil at Wargrave for a hundred pounds. They are hunting early this year. Stars and garters! if she don't come heading back! It's old Alma as sure as you are born, and she knows the ground."

They were all out in the garden, looking eagerly where Sugden pointed, expecting every moment to see Mr. Davis, and a noble cavalcade, come streaming out of the forest-ride. They were disappointed; it was not one of Her Majesty's deer which Sugden had seen, but a great dog, nearly as large and nearly of the same colour, which now came cantering towards them. They had stared after him so long, and, after they had found out what he was, had stood looking at him so long, that some one else had time to come behind them, and, while they were slowly realizing that it

was only one of the bloodhounds from the hall, a harsh voice from behind them said—

“He won’t eat you. If he did, he would not get very fat off you.”

They turned, and found themselves face to face with Silcote.

All three were too much surprised to speak, and so they stood a moment or so, and looked at Silcote. A compact, intensely firm-looking and broad-shouldered figure, with a grizzly head, square features, and a continual frown. Dress: grey coat, grey breeches, grey gaiters, square and inexorable boots. The late Mr. Cobbett would have admired the look of him very much until they got at loggerheads, which would not have been long.

He had to begin the conversation again. “You stand frightened at the first sight of me, you sheep! I was saying that, if my dogs ate a dozen such as you, they would not get fat. You peasantry are getting too lean even to eat, with your ten shillings a week, and your five shillings off for rent, firing, clothes’ club, and the rest of it. You are sheep, mere sheep. Why don’t you make a Jacquerie of it? You hate me, and

I hate you. Why don't you cut my throat, burn my house down—unless you want it for your own purposes—and subdivide my lands ? Bah ! you have no courage for a Saxon population. Cannot you produce a Marat ? ”

It was Mrs. Sugden who answered. “ You seem in one of your dark moods, Squire—that is to say, talking more nonsense than usual. You say you hate us, *cela va sans dire*; you say we hate you—that is completely untrue of us as a class,—the more particularly about you, who are, with all your foolishness, the justest landlord about these parts. As I used to say to the Duchess of Cheshire, ‘ Don’t patronize these people in the way you do. Love them and trust them, and they will in some sort love and trust you. Don’t be always teasing them in their own houses, and worrying them to death with impertinent inquiries about their domestic matters. They will only lie to you, and hate you. Come to them sometimes as *Deus ex machina*, and relieve them from some temporary difficulty. You can always do that, for they are always in difficulties. You can buy them up at a pound a head like that, whereas, if you hunt and

worry them, ten pounds won't make them grateful.' Now, my dear squire, what is the object of *your* visit?"

Never, probably, was a man so utterly aghast as Silcote. Here was a common labourer's wife, dressed in the commonest print, a woman he had never seen or never noticed before, blowing him up in French and Latin, and most audaciously pricking him in the most delicate and most cherished parts of his long-loved folly, and saying things to him which his own petted Arthur dare not say. He looked, speechless, and saw only a common labourer's wife, in a common print gown, who laughed at him while he looked.

But she was very beautiful. Silcote had seen peasant women as beautiful, in the same style, in the Pays de Caux, but never in England. Silcote had never seen the very light brown hair and the perfectly sharply cut features of the Norman among the English peasantry before ; and, indeed, one seldom does, unless there is a story which some old postmaster or old pensioned coachman will tell you, over the pipes and grog, after the cricket-club dinner. Silcote stood amazed. He had his suspicions at once—the

man lived on suspicion ; but he was a gentleman, in speech at all events.

“ I beg your pardon. I was not aware there was a lady here. I beg your pardon.”

“ There is no lady here ; no semblance of one. I am merely an honest and respectable, perfectly honest and respectable, peasant woman. You may see me working in the fields any day, ‘ stooping and straddling in the clogging fallows.’ Let me observe that you have shut yourself up from the world too much, or you would never have accused me of being a lady. Ladies, as far as I can judge from my limited experience of them, don’t speak to gentlemen as I spoke to you just now.”

“ May I ask you a question, ma’am ? ” said Silcote, still lost in wonder.

“ A dozen, if you choose.”

“ And get a dozen refusals of answer. Well and good, but will you answer this one out of the imaginary dozen ? I will only ask you one, and I ask it. *Who are you ?* ”

“ Exactly what I said before. A peasant’s daughter, who worked in the fields, who became dairymaid when

her father became cowman ; who, in consequence of her great beauty, I believe " (here she drew herself up, and proudly, but frankly and honestly, looked at Silcote with the great brown eyes of hers), " became lady's maid to Lady Caroline Poyntz, now Duchess of Cheshire. Those Poyntz girls would have everything handsome about them. Then there came a paradise of folly : no, not folly ; true love and good intentions are not folly. And then I turned peasant again, and then I went back to my old work, and you passed me the other day, scowling like your old self, while I was setting beans. Now, what did you please to want here, Silcote ? "

The Squire finding, after a good many years, some one who was not a bit afraid of him, answered civilly and to the purpose.

" The fact is, that this boy of yours behaved very pluckily last night. I want to better him. I will take him into the stable as a helper, and he will rise. It is a provision for him. These Cockney servants I get from Reading never stay. Tom, who will be my heir, has taken a fancy to him ; in fact, brought him

home last night. He will be stud-groom, and will be provided for for life. Will you let him come?"

"No. Let him stick to his sheep. I, you see, know more of domestic service than most, and my answer is, 'No.' Let him freeze and bake on the hillside with his sheep. Let him stay up late with his team, and then get out of his warm bed in the biting winter weather to feed them again at four. Let him do hedge and ditch work on food which a Carolina negro would refuse; let him plough the heaviest clay until the public-house becomes a heaven and a rest to him; let him mow until the other mowers find him so weak that he must mow with them no longer, lest he ruin the contract; let him reap until his loud-tongued wife can beat him at *that*—for he must marry, O Lord, for he must marry, and in his own station too; let him go on at the plough tail; among the frozen turnips, among the plashy hedgesides, until the inevitable rheumatism catches him in the back, and the parish employs him on the roads to save the rates; and then, when his wife dies, let them send him to the house, and let him rot there and be buried in a box: but he shall

not be a domestic servant for all that, Silcote. I know too much about that. We have vices enough of our own, without requiring yours."

Silcote had nothing more to say—to her, at least. What he had to say he said to himself as he went home.

"That is a devil of a woman. She is all wrong, but she puts it so well. I never saw such a deuce of a woman in my life."

So two violent ill-regulated souls struck themselves together in consequence of this poaching raid, to the great benefit of both.

CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH JAMES BEGINS HIS CAREER.

ALGERNON's children had departed from London. Captain Tom, having had the confessed moiety of his debts paid, was at Dublin with his regiment. Arthur was back at his tutor work; no one was left with the Squire but the golden-haired child Anne.

Once Silcote had a son, some say the best loved of all, who rebelled against him and his hard strained authority and coarse words, and left his house in high disdain, casting him off with scorn, and rendering the breach between them utterly irreparable by marrying a small tradesman's daughter. He got some small clerkship in Demerara, where he died in a very few years—as men who suddenly wrench up every tie and association are apt to die—of next to nothing. His pretty and good little wife followed him soon,

and Anne was left to the mercies of a kind sea captain who had brought them over. The first intimation which Silcote had of his son's death was finding a seafaring man waiting in his hall one day with a bright little girl of about three years old. Silcote heard the story of his son's death in dead silence, accepted the child, and then coolly began to talk on indifferent nautical matters with the astounded mariner. He kept him to lunch, plied him with rare and choice liquor of every kind, and was so flippant and noisy, that the bemuddled sailor quitted the house under the impression that Silcote was the most unfeeling brute he had ever met in his life. It was Silcote's humour that he should think so, and he had his wish.

From this time she was never allowed to leave him. He was never ostentatiously affectionate to her before other people, but they must have had a thoroughly good understanding in private, this queer couple, for she was not only not a bit afraid of him, but absolutely devoted to him. She was never thwarted or contradicted in any way, and so no wonder she loved him.

Such treatment and such an education would have

spoilt most children. Anne was a good deal spoilt, but not more so than was to have been expected. She used to have bad days,—days in which everything went wrong with her; days which were not many hours old when her maid would make the discovery, and announce it pathetically, that Miss had got out of bed the wrong side. We will resume her acquaintance on one of these days, and see her at her worst.

Silcote hated the servants to speak to him unless he spoke first, and then, like most men who shut themselves from the world, would humiliate himself by allowing them to talk any amount of gossip and scandal with him. Anne's conduct had, however, been so extremely outrageous this morning, that, when Silcote had finished his breakfast, had brooded and eaten his own heart long enough, and ordered Anne to be sent to him to go out walking, the butler gratuitously informed him, without waiting for any encouragement to speak, that "Miss was uncommon naughty this morning, and had bit the Princess."

"What has she been worrying the child about ?
The child don't bite me. Fetch her here."

Anne soon appeared, dressed for walking, in a radiant and saintlike frame of mind. She was so awfully good and agreeable that any one but that mole Silcote would have seen that she was too good by half. One of the ways by which Silcote tried to worry himself into Bedlam (and he would have succeeded, but for the perfect healthiness of his constitution) was this,—he would take up an imaginary grievance against some one, and exasperate himself about it until he was half mad. Any one who gives himself up to the vice of self-isolation, as Silcote had for so many years, may do the same; may bring more devils swarming about his ears than ever buzzed and flapped round the cell of a hermit. He did so on this occasion. He got up in his own mind a perfectly imaginary case against the poor long-suffering Princess for ill-using Anne, and went, muttering and scowling, out for his morning's walk, with Anne, wonderfully agreeable and exquisitely good, beside him.

They went into the flower-garden first, and Anne, with sweet innocence, asked if she might pick some flowers. Of course he said Yes; and, after walking up and down for a quarter of an hour, the head-

gardener came to him, and respectfully gave him warning. When Silcote looked round, he frankly asked the man to withdraw his warning, and told him that he would be answerable if it did not occur again. Anne had distinguished herself. In a garden, kept as M'Croskie kept that at Silcote's, you can soon do twenty pounds' worth of damage. Anne had done some thirty. Thunbergias, when clumsily gathered, are apt to come up by the root, and you may pull up a bed before you get a satisfactory bunch. Araucarias, some of them, form very tolerable backs for bouquets, but they were very expensive then. Also, if you pull away hap-hazard at a bed of first-class fuchsias, have a rough-and-tumble fight with a Scotch terrier in a bed of prize calceolarias, and end by a successful raid on the orchis-house, destroying an irreplaceable plant for every blossom you pluck, you will find that thirty pounds won't go very far, and that no conscientious gardener will stay with you. Anne had done all this, and more.

Silcote got the head-gardener to withdraw his resignation; and then, keeping hold of Anne's hand, passed on to the stable-yard without having attempted any

remonstrance with her. If she had burnt the house down, it would have been just the same. As he stood at that time he was a perfect fool. Hard hit, years and years ago, in a tender place, he had, as he expressed it, "fled from the world,"—from the world which was spinning all round him. He had brought himself to confess that he had been unjust and hard to this child's father, and he was, in his way, atoning for it by ruining the child by over-indulgence, as he had ruined her father by selfish ill-temper. It is hardly worth talking about. When a man takes to revenging himself on the whole world for the faults of one or two by withdrawing himself into utter selfishness, his folly takes so many forms that it gets unprofitable to examine them in detail. Let us leave Silcote reading his Heine and his Byron, and let him, as much as possible, speak for himself in future. A man's "*Iamity*"—to use a word taken from Mr. Lewes's witty account of his transcendental friend—is but a dull business. Let us clear the ground by saying that Silcote conceived himself to have suffered an inexpiable wrong, that he had nursed and petted that wrong instead of trying to forget and forgive it, and

that he had brooded so long over his original wrong that, on the principle of *crescit indulgens*, he had come to regard everything as a wrong, and very nearly to ruin both his life and his intellect. Well did the peasantry call him the “Dark Squire.” The darkness of the man’s soul was deep enough at this time, and was to be darker still; but there was a dawn behind the hill, if it would only rise, and in the flush of that dawn stood Arthur and the peasant woman. Would the dawn rise over the hill, and flush Memnon’s temples, till he sang once more? Or would the dark hurtling sand-storms always rise betwixt the statue and the sun, until the statue crumbled away?

Wherever Anne went that morning she was naughtier and naughtier. In the fowl-yard she hunted the largest peacock, and pulled out his tail; and, if she behaved ill in the fowl-yard, she was worse in the stable, and worse again in the kennels. She carefully put in practice all the wickedness she knew—luckily not much, but, according to her small light, that of a Brinvilliers, unrestrained by any law, for her grandfather never interfered with her, and her uncle Arthur was miles away. Children can go on in this way, being very

naughty with perfect good temper, for a long time; but, sooner or later, petulance and passion come on, and hold their full sway until the child has stormed itself once more into shame and good behaviour. As one cannon shot, or one thunder growl, will bring down the rain when the storm is overhead, so, when a child has been persistently bad for some time, the smallest accident, or the smallest cross, will bring into sudden activity the subdued hysterical passion, which has, in reality, been the cause of a long system of defiant perversity. Anne's explosion, inevitable, as her shrewd grandfather had seen with some cynical amusement, came in this way.

At the kennel she had asked for a Scotch terrier puppy as a present; and, of course, her grandfather had given it to her. She had teased and bullied it ever since, until at last, when they had gone to the end of a narrow avenue of clipped yews which led to the forest, and had turned homewards, she teased the dog so much that it turned and bit her.

She was on the homeward side of her grandfather, and came running back to him, to put in force the child's universal first method of obtaining justice, that

of *telling* the highest available person in authority. "I'll tell mamma," or, "I'll tell your mother, as sure as you are born :" who has not heard those two sentences often enough ? The puppy had bit Anne ; and she, white with rage, ran back to tell her grandfather.

"He has bit me, grandpa. You must have seen him bite me. The woman saw him, for I saw her looking."

"The woman ?" said Silcote, "what woman ?" He turned as he spoke, and found himself face to face with the woman—Mrs. Sugden, who had come out of the forest end of the alley, and was standing close to him.

Very beautiful she was, far more beautiful than he had thought when he had seen her first. The features perfect, without fault ; the complexion, though browned with field labour, so exquisitely clear ; the pose of the body, and the set of the features, so wonderfully calm and strong. Her great grey eyes were not on him, though he could see them. They seemed to Silcote the cynical to be sending rays of pity and wonder upon the passionate child, as indeed they were. And, while he looked, this common labouring woman, with the

cheap cotton gown, turned her large grey eyes on him, Silcote, the great Squire; and in those eyes Silcote saw perfect fearlessness and infinite kindness; but he saw more than the eyes could show him. The eye, as a vehicle to carry one man's soul to another, has been lately very much overrated. Silcote, as a barrister, knew this very well; the eye to him was a good and believable eye, but what said the eyebrows? Their steady expansion told him of frankness and honesty, forming an ugly contrast to the eyebrows he saw in the glass every morning. What said the mouth? Strength and gentleness. What said the figure? Strength, grace, and wild inexorable purpose in every line of it.

So she was in silence and repose: in speech and action how different! How reckless the attitude, how rude and whirling the words!

“Silcote, you are making a rod for your back in your treatment of that child. She'll live to break your heart for you. Why do you not correct her?—Come here, child; what is the matter?”

The astonished child came and told her.

“ You should not have teased him, then. You are

naughty, and should be punished. Silcote, will you let me walk and talk with you?"

"Yes, if you won't scold me. You made a fine tirade the last time I spoke to you about the vices of our order. I wonder you are not afraid to walk with me."

"I am neither afraid of you nor of any other man, thank you. I certainly am not afraid of you, because you were originally not a very bad man, and have only come to your present level by your own unutterable selfish conceit. That there is no chance of mending you now I am quite aware: but still I have come to ask you a great favour, a favour which will cost you trouble and money. Mend your ways for this once, and grant my request, and afterwards——"

"Go to the deuce, hey?"

"By no means. I mean something quite different from that. You have not, I believe, done an unselfish thing for twenty years. Five-and-twenty is nearer the mark; you have been eating your own heart, and reproducing your own nonsense, ever since your first wife's death. Make a change. Do me this favour, and it will become easier to you to do others. In time,

if you live long enough, you may be a man again. Come."

He was not a bit surprised at her tone. She had startled him at his first interview with her, but that surprise had worn off. Let a man for twenty years shut himself into a circle of perfectly commonplace incidents and thoughts, the outside edge of that circle will become too solid to be easily broken. New facts, new phenomena, new ideas, may indent that outside edge ; but the old round whirls on, and, before the "wheel has come full circle" again, the dent is gone, as in a fused planet some wart of an explosive volcano is merely drawn to the equator, only leaving one of the poles flattened to an unappreciable degree. Mrs. Sugden, like Arthur, had dinged the outside edge of his selfishness. He soon became accustomed to both of them. The globe remained intact ; either there must be an internal explosion, or it would spin on for ever.

He answered her without the least hesitation or surprise. She was only a strong-minded woman in cotton, with a deuce of a tongue, and a history ; possibly a queer one, though she said it was not.

She was a new figure, and to a certain extent odd, but his last recollections of life were in a court of law, and he had seen odder figures there. He was perfectly content that she should walk up and down the garden with him, speaking on terms of perfect equality. Besides, she was clever, and bizarre, and required answering, and after so many years he had got tired of worrying his sister; and it was a new sensation to have a clever woman to face, who would give scorn for scorn, and not succumb with exasperating good nature.

“ You say you are come to ask a favour, the granting of which will cost trouble and money. I love money, and hate trouble. You have gone the wrong way to work.”

“ I am sorry for that, Silcote, because the thing I want done must be done, and you must do it. I really must have it done. Therefore, if you will be kind enough to point out how I have gone wrong, I will follow your directions and begin all over again; only you must do what I require. If you grant that, as you must, I will go to work in any way you choose to dictate.”

“I can’t go on twisting words about with a woman, who not only commits for herself *ignoratio elenchi* and *petitio principii* in the same breath, but also invents and uses some fifty new fallacies, never dreamt of by Aristotle or Aldrich. What do you want done?”

“You remember a conversation we had the week before last?”

“There she goes. There’s your true woman. Violates every law of reason and logic; then when you put her a plain question, asks you whether you remember a conversation you held with her the week before last. No, I don’t legally remember that conversation. I would perish on the public scaffold sooner than remember a word of it. I ask you what you want me to do, and I want an answer.”

“Do you know my boy?”

“No.”

“You do.”

“Then, as I never contradict a lady, I lie. But I don’t all the same.”

“You came after him the week before last, and you wanted him for a groom.”

“That may be, but I don’t know him. I have seen

more of the Lord Lieutenant than I have of him ; but I don't know the Lord Lieutenant, and I don't want to. He is a Tory, and I never know Tories. How do I know that your boy is not a Tory ? Now what do you want of me ? ”

“ I wish you would leave nonsense, Silcote, and come to the point.”

“ I wish you would leave beating about the bush, and come to the point.”

“ I will. You do know my boy, Squire, don't you ? ”

“ There she goes again. I knew she would. Who ever could bring a woman to the point ? No, I don't know your boy. I have told you so before. I ask you again what do you want with me ? ”

“ We shall never get on like this,” said Mrs. Sugden.

“ I don't think we shall,” said Silcote. “ But come, you odd and very queerly-dressed lady, confess yourself beaten, and I will help you out of your muddle.”

“ I shall do nothing of the kind,” said Mrs. Sugden.

“ Then we have come to a hitch. We had better come into the garden and have some peaches.”

She was silent for a moment, and then she took his hand. "Squire," she said, "for the first time in twenty-five years will you be serious,—will you be your old and better self? Instinct partly, and rumour partly, tell me that you were not always the foolish and unhappy man you are now. Help me, Silcote, even though I come asking for help with strange rude words in my mouth. Throw back your memory for forty years, before all this miserable misconception arose; try to be as you were in the old, old time, when your mother was alive, and that silly babbling princess-sister of yours was but a prattling innocent child—and oh, Silcote, help me, I am sorely bestead!"

She laid her delicate though brown right hand in Silcote's right, as she said this, and he laid his left hand over hers as she spoke, and said, "I'll help you." And so the past five-and-twenty years were for the moment gone, and there rose a ghost of a Silcote who had been, which was gone in an instant, leaving an echo which sounded like "Too late! Too late!" He held still the hand of this peasant-woman in his, and the echo of his last speech, "I will help you," had scarcely died out among the overarching cedars.

“I know you will. I knew you would. Listen, then. We have had a long and happy rest here, in the little cottage in the beech forest. You have known nothing of us, but you have been a good landlord, and we thank you. I fear the time has come when we must move forward again, and the world is a wide and weary place, Squire, and I am not so young as I was, and we are very, very poor; but we must be off on the long desolate road once more.”

“Stay near me, and I will protect you.”

“Nay, that cannot be. It is my boy I wish to plead for. I cannot condemn him to follow our fate. I must tear my heart out and part with him. Oh, my God, what shall I do? What shall I do?”

The outbreak of her grief was wild and violent for a time, and the Squire respected it in silence. The child now rambling far away among the flowers for a moment, wondered what her grandfather had said to make the strange woman cry.

“I will not allow him to be a domestic servant; but see, you are a governor of St. Mary’s Hospital. Give him, or get him a presentation there, and he is made for life. It is a poor innocent little thing, Squire,

but I have educated him well for his age, and he is clever and good. Let me plead for him. What a noble work to rescue one life from such a future as will be his fate if he remains in our rank of life! And a mother's thanks are worth something. Come, rouse yourself, and do this."

"I will do it, certainly," replied the Squire. "But think twice before you refuse all offers of assistance from me."

"I cannot think twice; it is impossible."

"Your boy will be utterly separated from you. . Have you thought of that?"

"Yes. I have resolutely inflicted that agony on myself, until use has deadened the pain."

"Have you reflected that it will be a severe disadvantage to your son for his companions to know that his parents are of such a humble rank in life, and that therefore you should not go and see him there?"

"I have suffered everything except the parting. If I can bear that, I shall live."

"Your son's path and yours separate from this moment. As years go on the divergence will be

greater, so that death itself will scarcely make a parting between you. Are you resolute?"

"I am quite resolute. Spare me."

"I will. God help you on your weary road, since you will take no help from man. Good-bye."

Silcote had given his last presentation to St. Mary's to his butler's boy, and he had no presentation to give. His time would not have come for years. But he said nothing about this, and never asked himself whether Mrs. Sugden was aware of the fact or no. Fifty pounds will do a great deal—even buy a couple or four votes ; and the next boy presented to the board of governors of St. Mary's was little James Sugden. The iron gates shut on him and the old world was dead ; only a dream of freedom and hardship. Instead, was a present reality of a gravelled yard, bounded by pointed windows ; of boys who danced round him the first few days, and jeered at him, but among whom he found his place soon ; of plenty to eat and of regulated hours. A good, not unkindly place, where one, after a time, learnt to be happy and popular. A great place, with the dim dull roar of the greatest city in the world always around it ; bounded by the tall iron gates,

outside which one had once seen a tall grey figure standing and watching. There was a new world of emulation and ambition inside those gates, but there was an old world outside which would not let itself be forgotten for months. So that at times James awakened in his bed in the dark midnight, and cried for his mother; but time goes fast with children, and the other boys pelted boots and hard things at him, and laughed at him, which was worse. In six months the mother was only a dim old dream, dear enough still, but very old, getting nearly forgotten. Would you have it otherwise? I would, but the wise ones say No.

And at home! How fared the poor patient mother in this case? Oh, you children, you children, have you any idea of your own unutterable selfishness? And, to make you more utterly selfish, they give you cakes and bright half-crowns, which you eat and spend while the poor mother at home lies sleepless. One of the most beautiful touches in that most beautiful book, "Tom Brown" (a book which only yesterday was as fresh and as good as ever), is the infinite grief of Tom when he finds that his letter has not been sent, and that

his mother must have thought him faithless to his last solemn promise for three days. Little bitter griefs like this, or Maggie Tulliver starving her brother's rabbits, or Mr. Van Brunt falling down the ladder and breaking his leg, seem, it is pleasant to reflect, to affect the public quite as much as the fiercest tragedies. But Tom Brown was no ordinary boy, any more than Maggie Tulliver was an ordinary girl. Children, for the most part, *are* selfish. James Sugden was no ordinary boy, either; but in the new hurly-burly into which he found himself thrust, where every boy's hand was good-naturedly against him, his mother's image was gone from his mind but very few months after her body had passed away from the gate. Only in the watches of the night this dearly loved one came back to him, and proved that, though she might be forgotten in the day-time, with all its riot and ambition, yet she was as dearly loved in his inmost heart as ever.

James Sugden the elder sat, in the evening, at the door of his cottage, sadly, with his face buried in his hands. It was a solemn September evening; the days were drawing in, and the chilly air, and the few first golden boughs, told of the long winter which was

coming. The Oxfordshire wolds were getting dim, and the western reaches in the river were getting crimson, when along the valley below a little column of steam fled swiftly, and a little train slid across a bridge, and into a wood, and was gone. Then he arose, and, having made some preparations, went out and watched again.

Not for long. Far across the broad darkening fields his keen sight made out a figure advancing steadily towards him. The footpath crossed the broad fields at different angles, and sometimes the figure was lost behind hedges or outstanding pieces of woodland; but he was sure of its identity, and sure that it was solitary. It was lost to his sight when it entered the denser forest which fringed the base of the hill; but he knew which way it would come, and advanced across the open glade to meet it. He was at the stile when Mrs. Sugden came out from the wood, tired, pale, and dusty, with her walk from Twyford, and she put her arm round his neck, and kissed his cheek.

They fenced a little at first. James said, "I thought you would come by that train. I saw it go by, and watched for you."

"It is a nice train. It's express, you know ; but the country gentlemen have made them drop a carriage at Twyford ; but there is no third class, and that makes eighteenpence difference, and the money is running so very short. And so you saw the branch train run along, did you ? I wouldn't come to Shiplake ; the walk is nearly as great, and there's the getting across the river."

And so they fenced, as they were walking together towards their cottage. On this occasion James showed the greater valour, by introducing first the subject nearest to both their hearts. He said, " You must tell me about it."

And she said, " It is all over."

He said, " Not quite, sister. I want to know how he went off. Come. Only one more tooth out, sister. Let me know how the boy went off. Now or never, while the wound is raw and fresh ; and then leave the matter alone for ever."

" If you will have it, Jim, he went off very well. Cried a deal ; quite as much as you'd expect any boy to cry who believed that he was going to see his mother again in a fortnight. I told him so, God help me !

Sent his love to you ; is that any odds ? Now it's all over, and I wish to have done with it. You've been a kind and loving brother to me, James, as God knows, and I have been but a poor sister to you. I have worried you from pillar to post, from one home to another, until I thought we had found one here. And now I have to say to my dear, stupid old brother, ' We must walk once more.' Oh, James, my dear brother ! if I could only see you settled with a good wife, now ; you have been so faithful and so true, you have given up so much for me."

A very few days afterwards, the steward was standing at his door, in the early dawn, when the Sugdens came towards him, and left the key of their cottage, paying up some trifle of rent. They were expedited for travelling, he noticed, and had large bundles. Their furniture, they told him, had been fetched away by the village broker, and the fixtures would be found all right. In answer to a wondering inquiry as to where they were going, James merely pointed eastward, and very soon after they entered the morning fog, bending under their bundles, and were lost to sight.

CHAPTER XII.

ARTHUR SILCOTE MAKES THE VERY DREADFUL AND
ONLY FIASCO OF HIS LIFE.

FOR two years there was no change worthy of mention, save that the muddle and untidiness in Lancaster Square grew worse instead of better, and Algernon's health suffered under the hopeless worry, which ever grew more hopeless as time went on.

Dora had grown into a fine creature, pretty at present with the universal prettiness of youth, but threatening to grow too large for any great beauty soon. Reggy had, likewise, grown to be a handsome, but delicate-looking, youth: with regard to the others we need not particularize. The pupils had been succeeded by two fresh ones, one of whom, a bright lad of sixteen, by name Dempster, was staying over the Christmas vaca-

tion—his father having returned to India—and supposed himself to be desperately in love with Dora, who received his advances with extreme scorn.

Old Betts was there still, not changed, in the least, to the outward eye. He used to go to the city every day, look into the shops, and come home again; at least, that was all he ever seemed to do: but it turned out afterwards that sometimes some of his old friends would, half in pity, half in contempt, throw into his way some little crumbs in the way of commission. Betts had carefully hoarded these sums, and kept his secret from Algernon, nursing it with great private delight until that morning; but Algernon's worn look had drawn it from him prematurely. He had been accumulating it for years, he told Algy, and there it was. He had meant to have kept it until it was a hundred pounds, and have given it to Algernon on his birthday. But it had come on him that morning that it lay with him to make the difference between a sad Christmas and a merry one; and who was he to interpose a private whim between them and a day's happiness? So there it was, ninety-four pounds odd; and it was full time to start across for church, and the least

said, the soonest mended. Algernon had said but little, for he was greatly moved, and he preached his kindly, earnest Christmas sermon with a cleared brow and a joyful voice which reflected themselves upon the faces of many of his hearers, and gladdened them also.

Algernon had been vexed and bothered for some time about his Christmas bills. This contribution of Mr. Betts towards the housekeeping relieved him from all anxiety, and made a lightness in his heart which had not been there for years. Firstly, because he found himself beforehand with the world; and secondly, because it showed him Betts in a new light. Mr. Betts had been vulgar, ostentatious, and not over honest in old times—had been cringing and somewhat tiresome in the later ones. But he had distinctly and decidedly done a kind action in a graceful and gentlemanly way. Anything good delighted Algy's soul; and here was something good. He and Betts were an ill-assorted couple, brought together by the ties of chivalrous kind-heartedness on the one hand, and of sheer necessity on the other; and this action of Mr. Betts drew them closer together than they had ever been before. It reacted on Betts himself with the best effects. It re-

moved that wearing sense of continual humiliating obligation, which too often, I fear, makes a man hate his kindest friend ; and caused him to hold his head higher than he had held it for a long time. As he told Algernon over their modest bottle of sherry after dinner, when the children had gone to the Regent's Park to see the skaters, he felt more like a man than he had ever felt since his misfortune. When Algy said, in reply, that he thanked God that his misfortune had been so blessed to him, he did not speak mere pulpit talk, but honestly meant what he said. If you had driven him into a corner, he, I think, with his inexorable honesty, would have confessed that what he meant was, that Betts, although he still dropped his h's and ate with his knife, was becoming more of a gentleman—consequently more of a Christian—consequently nearer to the standard of Baliol or University. Algy's Christianity was so mixed with his intense Oxfordism, that to shock the latter was, I almost fancy, for a moment to weaken the former. Who can wonder at it? Three years of perfect happiness had been passed there. Alma Mater had been (forgive the confusion of metaphor) an Old Man of the Mountain to him, and had admitted him

into Paradise for three years. He was bound to be a mild and gentle Assassin for her for the rest of his life.

We must leave him, in the beams of the first sunshine which had fallen on him for some years, to follow the very disorderly troop that posted off, with their early Christmas dinner in their mouths, to see the skaters in the Regent's Park. They were a very handsome, noisy, and disorderly group, and the inexorable laws of fiction compel me to follow them, and use them as a foil; because their leader, Miss Lee, was louder, more disorderly, and a hundred times more beautiful than the whole lot of them together.

If she had been less thoroughly genial and good-humoured it would have been (for some reasons) much better. If she had been less demonstrative in the streets it would have been much better. If she had been less noisy and boisterous, it would have been a great deal better still. If she had not been so amazingly beautiful, one could have excused all her other shortcomings. But here she was, and one must make the best of her:

beautiful, attractive, boisterous, noisy; ready at any moment to enter into an animated and friendly discussion with a policeman, or for that matter a chimney-sweep: with a great tendency to laugh loudly at the smallest ghost of a joke, and perfectly indifferent as to whether she stood on the pavement, in the gutter, or in the middle of the road. There she was, in short, her real self; as she was at that time. A mass of kindness, vitality, and good humour; half spoilt by her imperfect training, and further spoilt by the respectful indulgence she had been used to in Algernon's house; but as clever as need be.

"I can't think why it is," said Algernon once, in answer to a remonstrance of Arthur's about this young lady (little *he* knew what was in store for *him*). "She was not boisterous when she first came to me. There was not a quieter girl anywhere. She can't have learnt to be noisy from *me*. I am sure I ain't a noisy man."

But Miss Lee had had the bit between her teeth so long that at all events *she* was very noisy: And she had another *spécialité* which I think is common

to all young ladies of excessive vitality and good humour, who are not accustomed to control of any kind. If she saw any one of either sex doing anything, she must straightway, on the spot, do that thing herself. On their first starting, for instance, Dempster, the pupil, illegally, and in defiance of Her Majesty's peace, throne, and government, &c. &c., went down a slide. Miss Lee promptly essayed to do the like, regardless of time or place. Now the three or four winters which Miss Lee had passed in London had been mild, and sliding is not an art practised in Devonshire; Miss Lee had never tried sliding before, and so came down on the back of her head in the street, and began to think that she was enjoying herself.

With her kindly, uncontrollable vivacity, in the brisk winter air she became more "berserk" as she went on. She was only twenty or so, and life was a very glorious and precious possession to her. An honest, innocent, childish creature, who had only lately found out that she was a child no longer, and wanted a lover whom she could tease and make run about for her. She knew how to treat lovers

from an infinite number of novels; only she had not got one yet. She wanted one sadly; what woman does not? She was not utterly unconscious of her wonderful beauty, and she was thinking, on this very afternoon, whether Dempster, the pupil, was not old enough to be made a fetch-and-carry lover of: and she came to the conclusion that he was not old enough to stand it, and that she might still find a rival in raspberry tarts. This day, for the last time in her life, she was nothing more than a wild school-girl. Remember that she had no mother, no cultivation, and for three or four years no control whatever. If she was an unworthy person, she would not be mentioned here.

It is not necessary to follow Miss Lee and her charge through their long afternoon's walk. It might be funny; but we don't want to be funny. Enough to say that, what with good health, good humour, youth, and a natural enough carelessness of appearance, she committed a hundred small indiscretions; and arrived home by much the most boisterous of the party. And, after a short scrambling and riotous tea, they all took to blind-man's-buff as a sedative.

When every one had got more tangled and excited than ever; when Algernon was laughing fit to split his sides; when Mr. Betts, intensely interested and enthusiastic, had, as blind man, walked bang into the fire and burnt himself, under the belief, Dora wickedly suggested, that Miss Lee was up the chimney; then Miss Lee herself proposed that they—with a view to rest and quiet themselves before supper and snap-dragoon—should have a game of hide-and-seek all over the house. It was voted by acclamation; and, during the acclamations, one of the junior Silcotes, who are practically out of this story, fell down stairs, with such a thumping of his soft body on the stair carpet, such a rattling of the nearly equally soft head of him against the banisters, and such a clatter of loose stair rods which he brought after him in the catastrophe, that they were all quiet for nearly five seconds, until his frantic father had dashed down, and found him lying in the hall un-hurt, under the impression that he had distinguished himself, and done the thing of the evening! Then they began their hide-and-seek.

Mr. Betts hid first; but Dora contemptuously

walked up to him, and took him from behind the scullery door. Then Reginald hid, and with amazing dexterity got *home* into the front parlour through the folding doors which connected that room with his father's study, which was the back parlour on the first floor (perpend it for yourselves in a twelve-roomed house; you will find it come right, for I saw it. I might describe the spreading of bread and butter, or the baking of cakes, but I must not dwell on a game of hide-and-seek). After this, Dora had hid, but Dempster the pupil had found her, and the rest of them found that Dora had lost her temper. A rude boy, I fear, that Dempster, though neither of them said anything about it afterwards. Perhaps an ill-achieved kiss may be worth a sound box on the ears, and a week's sulks. That is a matter in which only the first parties are concerned. Then when confusion and fun were grown into mad hurly-burly, it became Miss Lee's turn to hide.

At this time, also, it became Arthur Silcote's turn—after having preached for, and also dined with, a Balliol man in the neighbourhood—to step across to his brother to see how he was getting on, to

knock at the door, to be admitted instantly by a grinning maid-servant, and, on inquiring about the noise in the house, to be told, by that confused and delighted young person, that they were playing at blind-man's-buff, and that his niece, Miss Dora, was at that moment hiding behind the study curtains.

I dread going on. I am afraid of telling the awful catastrophe which followed. It is very dreadful, but there is not a bit of harm in it, and it might happen to any one to-morrow. Arthur knew the way perfectly well; and he, the preux chevalier of Baliol, the man who was considered a perfect prig about women among men quite as particular as he, then and there, believing that it was his little niece Dora, lugged out Miss Lee from behind the curtain, kissed her, called her his dear little pussy, and then, putting his two hands behind her waist, jumped her towards the door, just as Dora and the whole party came in with a candle, Dora saying, "Don't tell me; I know she is here." She was indeed. And so was her uncle.

CHAPTER XIII.

TWO MORE GUESTS.

THE most awful part of the accident remained a profound secret. All that the astonished Dora and the rest of the children saw, was that Miss Lee and her uncle were alone together in the dark, and that they were both the colour of that rose which she knew at Silcotes as "General Jacqueminot." Dora said little, but thought the more: all she said was, "Why, you are all in the dark here. Uncle, how did you get in?" After which they all went up stairs, the younger ones shouting all together to their father and grandfather, how they had found Miss Lee and Uncle Archy, alone in the dark in the study. Miss Lee was not present, and Algernon rallied his brother right pleasantly. Archy replied that it was

an accident, but so very awkwardly that Algernon, little conscious of the magnitude of the disaster, thought how very shy about women university life was apt to make men otherwise perfectly self-possessed.

When Miss Lee reappeared at the supper-table, leading in the two youngest children, the blushes had blazed out of her beautiful cheeks. She was nicely dressed in a well-cut quiet dress; not that it was of much consequence to such radiant beauty as hers (as Dr. Holmes so prettily says, anything almost will do to cover young and graceful curves). The hair was banded up, and nothing was left of the late disorder. In the expression of her face, her attitudes, and her air, she combined the dignified humility of the governess with the melancholy pride of the gentlewoman of fallen fortunes; the modesty of extreme youth with the consciousness of a beauty which in her humble circumstances was a vexatious annoyance to her, and with which she would gladly have dispensed. Nothing was ever better done. The worst of it was that it was thrown away on every one except Dora, whose eyes grew wider with wonder

while she looked and remembered the indiscretions of the morning walk. "You would not come in at the beginning of the second lesson, if *he* was reading prayers, my lady," said the shrewd young person to herself.

But all this exquisite moral "get up" was lost on Arthur for a time. He did not even notice the curtsey and look with which she greeted him: an inclination made with dropped eyelids, which expressed humility, dignity, and a forgiving sense of injury received (for she knew well enough that he had complained of her being noisy: secrets are not long kept in a house so untidy as that of Algernon's). He never looked at her. He had not seen her for some time, and had never observed her closely, being very shy of looking at women. He now regarded her as an objectionable and fast-going person, in whose power he had put himself utterly; whom by a horrible combination of evil stars and evil influences, he had kissed in the dark, called his pussy, and jumped up and down. If she would only have complained to Algy, he could have apologised and explained, but she wouldn't. As a gentle-

man, he had to keep the dreadful secret, and he almost hated her.

I should be inclined to say that it was very difficult to hate anything really beautiful and good very long, if the aforementioned good and beautiful thing gives you anything like an opportunity of appreciating and admiring it. Miss Lee gave Arthur every opportunity of admiring and appreciating her, though Arthur upset her arrangements by not looking at her. Dora looked at her, however, even before supper, and looked at her so long, and with such an expression of wonder in her face, that Mr. Betts asked her what she was gazing at. She replied, "At Miss Lee," and Miss Lee heard her.

"Why are you looking at Miss Lee so strong?"

"I was wondering whether she had been hurt on the slide this morning," answered Dora.

"If I had been, Dora," answered Miss Lee, "I should have gone to bed."

There was such an awkward emphasis on the word *bed* that Dora felt that she was not quite Miss Lee's match yet, and had better hold her tongue.. For there was no appeal against Miss Lee in that house;

and Miss Lee, in her position as governess, could send anybody to bed in five minutes. Dora, although in opposition to her governess, as a true British young lady is bound to be, had sense enough to hold her tongue and let things drive. "So you are going to set your cap at Uncle Arthur, are you, my lady?" she said to herself. "Good gracious, goodness me, how fine we are getting all of a sudden! Yes, indeed! Oh, quite so! Bed may be bed, my lady, but I have seen the last of French irregular verbs for some time, I fancy; unless I am a born fool, which I ain't; no, nor I won't be kept in over my colloquia French either, after this; and she trampolining away to Hampstead with the children, and Dempster, and riding donkeys, because I said, '*Il va pluvoir.*'"

Dora was rebellious against Miss Lee, although they were the best friends in the world.

They had just sat down to supper when a new guest arrived.

A gallant-looking youth, with good features and fine bold intelligent eyes, dressed in a quiet but very becoming uniform. He stood behind Algernon's chair,

waiting for recognition ; and Dora saw him first, and called attention to him.

" My boy," said Algernon, turning kindly on him, " I had given you up. How late you are. You have lost all the fun, and we have had such a merry day. Come and sit by me. What made you so late?"

" We had anthem in chapel this afternoon,—Purcell's. And the third master, Hicks, asked me, as a favour, to stay and help ; and we always do anything for him. So I came by the six o'clock train."

" Well, here you are at last ; make yourself as happy as you may. Sit beside me. Reginald, this is the new schoolfellow I told you of. He has promised to be your protector. Come and make friends with him."

Reginald looked for one moment at Dora, but Dora was ready for his telegraph, and left looking at the new comer, and nodded twice or thrice shortly and rapidly at Reginald. The nod said emphatically, " He'll do ;" and Reginald went and sat beside him. Dora, the opened-eyed, watched them. At first Reginald was a little shy, but soon, as far as she could see—for

she could not hear—the stronger, older, and handsomer boy won him over by kindness of talk. Dora looked until Reginald took out his bran new knife, and showed it to the strange boy. Then she said, “*That’s all right. Now let’s see how you two other little people are getting on.*” The two people, whom she called “the two other little people,” were not getting on at all. Her uncle and Miss Lee were at opposite sides of the table, and were not looking at one another. “If he were her director, I wonder if she would confess about the slide,” thought Dora.

But Dora found that youth, good humour, and innocence were very pleasant things to contemplate, and so she looked at the two boys again, and her honest heart was satisfied. They had got their heads together now, and Reginald had got his peg-top and his string and his dibbs and agate taws, out all round his plate of plum-pudding, and was showing them to the big boy in the uniform, who seemed to possess none of these treasures.

“He is poorer than Reggy,” she said, “and how gentle and pleasant he looks! I like that boy.”

And indeed he looked very likeable indeed, in his

quiet manly dress, and his whole face beaming with kindness and pleasure.

There was some pleasant discussion about one of the large agate marbles, and the two boys appealed to Algernon, who sat radiant beside them. Reginald stretched across the strange lad, and pushed him against his father, so that his curly head was almost against Algernon's face. At the same moment a great brown hand was twisted gently into the lad's curls, and his head was pulled back until the owner of the hand could look down into the boy's face. At which time a loud, pleasant voice said,—

“Out of the way curly-wig, and let us have a chance at your father. Algy, old cock, how are you?”

There was a general rising and confusion. All sorts of notes composed the harmony which followed; but from Mr. Betts' contented growl of “The Captain, by jingo!” down to the shriek of the smallest child from Miss Lee's kind arms, “Uncle Tom, what have you brought us?” the notes, discordant in sound, were the same in sentiment. They meant enthusiastic welcome to the ne'er-do-well and ne'er-to-do-better, Captain Tom Silcote of Silcotes.

Algy was very much affected and touched. He never cried, even in his most pathetic sermon ; but he had to stop sometimes, and he stopped now. When he had done stopping he said,—

“My dearest Tom ! This is kind.”

“I don’t see it. Archy, boy, he says it’s kind of me to come and get such a welcome as this. How are you, Betts ? Miss Lee, my good creature, you look—all right, Algy—Miss Lee, you look, you look—I don’t know what the deuce you don’t look like. There—there’s no harm in that. Out of the way, you handsome young monkey, and let me get near your father.”

“That is not my boy, Tom : that is a friend of Reginald’s.”

“Then go, friend of Reginald’s, slope, and make love to Dora, if the young pepper-box will let you. Any way, give me this chair. The room smells of turkey : have it fetched back, I am as hungry as a hunter. Betts, is there a good glass of sherry in the house ? Hold your tongue, Algy — what do you know about good sherry ? See how wise old Betts looks all of a sudden. Six fingers is sixty ! Nonsense, man ; is

your Aunt Jane dead? A Christmas treat? All right! let's have a glass, then. Betts, old fellow, I want to talk to you on business. Archy, how are you and the other prigs getting on at Oxford?"

Arthur was not in good humour with his brother. As fellow and tutor of Balliol, he had to do with fast men at that college, such as there were. As a pro-proctor, who was taking a somewhat peculiar line in the university, he had to do with fast men of other colleges—very fast men; men who could not be tolerated at Balliol for half a term. But his brother Tom was faster than any of them. Arthur had to do with many cases of fast lads. The last was that of a servitor at Christ Church, who had been hunting in pink, and owed 500*l.* (a real case). Arthur had seen to this lad's affairs, and had compounded with his creditors for about eighteen years' penal servitude. I mean that he was to deny himself every luxury and pleasure for some eighteen years, to pay off the debts, with the interest on them, which he had contracted in one year among wine-merchants, livery-stable keepers, and grooms. When will lads give over believing that hunting at five pounds a day is

the summit of human happiness? When are the dons going to forbid fox-hunting?

But this servitor lad was penitent, and promised amendment. Tom was nothing of the kind. Arthur had been the agent between his father and his eldest brother in the last settlement of Tom's everlasting debts. He had taken to the Squire a schedule of Tom's debts, which he knew, by his dawning knowledge of the world, to be only a half statement; but he had taken it, and asked for payment. The sum was so fearful—eight thousand pounds—that he, brave as he was, knowing that sum was not all the reality, was frightened when he presented it. He did not recover his nerve until the Squire, in his cursing, cursed *him* as an accomplice. Then anger gave him nerve, and he resumed that old ascendancy over his father which his perfect rectitude had in the first instance given him: feeling at the same time like a villain, because he was sure, in his innermost heart, that the schedule of Tom's debts was understated. The moment when Silcote the elder recovered from his furious indignation sufficiently to tell Arthur that he could trust *him* at all events,

was probably the most bitter and the most degraded of his life.

The C. C. servitor had told the truth, and had been penitent; not that the penitence of that sort of young gentleman is of much use, unless they are steadily whipped in by a stronger hand and will. His brother Tom, as he knew perfectly, whenever he *chose* to know, had not told the truth, and there was not one half-penny worth of penitence about him. So Arthur was in contemptuous variance with his brother. Tom's persistent wrong-doing and waste of life were to his mind inexplicable and hateful; and, moreover, Tom had outstepped an arbitrary line which the world lays down, and the world was beginning to talk. How long he might stay in his present regiment was very doubtful.

And so not caring to look much at his brother, he looked another way; and the other way happened to be Miss Lee's way; and, as she had her eyes turned away, he had courage to look at her; and, when he had begun looking at her, he found he could not leave off; she was beyond all he had ever dreamed of. This was the creature he had complained of as being

boisterous, and had—heavens ! that wouldn't do to think about. She was sitting quite alone, and no one was speaking to her; every one was busy round his brother. What could a gentleman do but go across and speak to a lady under such circumstances ? Was she unconscious of his approach ? If so, why was her heart drumming away such a triumphant tune ? But, at all events, her air was one of extreme unconsciousness, when, with a sudden start as he spoke, she turned her wondering, lovely face on his.

CHAPTER XIV.

ST. MARY'S BY THE CITY.

ST. MARY's Hospital was founded much about the same time as Christ's Hospital, was nearly as rich as that very noble institution, and in some respects closely resembled it. Like Christ's Hospital, it was hemmed in to the great city, and the boys wore a miserable and ridiculous dress. Here the resemblance between that noble institution and St. Mary's ceased altogether. St. Mary's had copied its faults, but none of its excellences ; at all events, results seemed to prove so. Christ's Hospital has, I think, 600 boys ; St. Mary's, with nearly the same wealth, has 190 odd. Christ's Hospital has turned out, and turns out every year, some very noble men. St. Mary's never turned out anything, not even—forgive the pun—a good many boys who had much better have been turned out.

Some little mistake in the founder's will had begun the ruin of this place. Lands had been left in Essex, Northumberland, and Cornwall for its maintenance, from which the master was to receive 50*l.* a year, and eight fellows 20*l.* a year each, that they might educate in the fear of God, grammar, plainsong, and the use of organs, and also maintain, free of cost, any boys that might be recommended to them by any future benefactors of the hospital. But, out of the surplus funds of the hospital, twelve boys were annually to be apprenticed to trades, or, if they seemed to have gifts, to be sent to the universities of Oxford or Cambridge. Moreover, each year, the two best scholars were to be sent, the one to St. Paul's, Oxford, the other to St. Dominic's at Cambridge; at which colleges funds had been provided for their maintenance.

A foolish, rambling, kindly bequest. Let us see very shortly how it was acted on.

The first thing to notice is, that the institution became richer year by year, until its wealth was gigantic. As years rolled on, the wild bleak hungry farms in Cornwall, where rent had been so difficult

to collect, came to turn out their tons upon tons of tin, and the Northumberland estates vomited up their tons of coal in rivalry. The Lincolnshire estates now almost equalled in wealth the two others put together. The spire of Fenton Magna, one of the livings which came into their gift at the Reformation, which once gathered tithe from a little easterly knot of poor farms, and dominated a great saltwater-ruined tract, spreading easterly to the sea; now looked on broad rich fen lands as far as the eye could reach, and gathered its tithe from 8,000 acres of the richest and best farmed land in the world, instead of from 800 of the poorest and worst farmed. They were as rich as Christ Church, and had eight good livings in their gift. Let us see how they used their wealth.

They were bound to receive, and to maintain, any boy nominated by any future benefactor of the hospital. This was an awkward clause, because any one might have claimed to maintain a boy for a guinea. Illegally, but perhaps reasonably, they instituted an order of governors; any man giving them a hundred pounds down was to be a life governor; if they had been less wealthy, one could have excused them for

this precaution. With regard to the twelve boys to be apprenticed or sent to the university, they read that clause liberally, and apprenticed the whole lot of them. With regard to the two scholars that were to be sent to St. Paul's and St. Dominic's, why, they carried out their founder's will, and sent them there; and the funds left for their provision had increased in much the same proportion as their own, so that these young gentlemen had as little to complain of as the master and fellows of St. Mary's. The rest of the money they put into their own pockets, without fear of royal commissioners.

Who came, however. Granby Dixon was the man who did the business ostensibly, but Arthur Silcote, Granby Dixon's old Balliol friend, was the real mover in the matter, and when he moved he did so with a will. The thing was commissioned, looked into, and abolished. It was worse than Dulwich. The commissioners had no difficulty whatever, the matter was too shameful; they, having arranged the financial matters, made their *congé* to the master, fellows, and governors, saying at the same time, through their chairman, that they left the rest to the governors;

whose authority had been so long respected, now that it could not be resisted.

Our little friend, James, had been nearly a year at the school, and was beginning to get used to it, if not to like it. This place was warm, there was always enough to eat here, and the people were kind. No putting on of hard boots on frozen feet here. No dinners of dry crusts, no battling with hail, snow, or long dull driving south-westerly rain. In this place kind and strong hands had conquered Nature, so that the young and the feeble might rest from the lower strife to prepare themselves for the higher one. Still, Nature had not always been unkind to him ; she had sometimes her tender gentle moods. There had been long cloudless days, with the blue unstained, from sunrise to sunset ; there had been deep hazel copses of green and gold ; and long shallows over silver gravel where one lay and rolled, seeing the spotted fish scud by under the quivering water : as well as there had been wild days when one had to drag one's weary limbs over clay fallows. These better moods of Nature he missed in his brick prison. He had now been there eight months, spend-

ing holidays and all there, and his ear wearied at the roar of the surrounding city, which had never ceased, night or day, all that weary time.

He had leave on certain saints' days to wander in that city, and he had made one or two efforts to pierce the surrounding network of brick and mortar, and get to the country once more. In the hot solitude of his Midsummer vacation he had planned and tried to execute the greatest of these expeditions. Sleeping on his cherished purpose, he awoke full of eagerness to carry it out, and started southward as soon as the gates were opened, on a bright summer's morning. His object was to reach a certain "Peerless Pool," which existed, and still I think exists, behind Lambeth, of which a boy, a friend of his, had told him; to bathe there, and return. He had plenty of money—threepence—and the distance could scarcely be more than four miles. The thing promised well, but it ended in complete disappointment. The boys in the immediate neighbourhood had got used to the absurd and hideous green baize petticoats in which the St. Mary's boys were clothed, and knew that to bully a solitary one was to have the whole swarm

about your ears ; but as he got further afield his clothes attracted still more attention, until at last advance became impossible. They would have no boys in green baize petticoats there. He was a boy who would fight, as we have seen before, but you can't fight an enemy numbering hundreds, in detail, one down another on. He lost nerve and ran at last, and was as a matter of course pursued ; he managed at last to lose his pursuers, and himself also, in a maze of little streets : and by eleven o'clock he was back at the school, panting and wearied, with the hot tears of grief and indignation ready to break out when the time should come.

Tears did not come at first ; anger and pride kept his eyes dry for a time ; but a turn or two in solitude through the desolate whitewashed corridors, and the more desolate dormitories, threw the self which had asserted and forgotten itself in the cruelty and turmoil of the streets back upon self once more. And self sent back to self means utter isolation and hopeless misery. In children it produces a wild hysterical passion of tears, which rends the body until it deadens the sense of desolation in the mind : with

grown men who cannot weep it is less merciful. Are there not suicides and madmen ?

James, poor lad, after having failed utterly and miserably in his long cherished expedition—after having, in spite of his valour, been pummelled, beaten, and forced to fly to the only home he knew now—made more miserable by the sight of those empty corridors and dormitories, went out into the wide hot main quadrangle, and did what nature told him to do : cried himself to sleep against the pump. The pump was close to the board-room window, and there was a board to-day ; but it was as good a place as another.

He fell asleep, and he had a dream, very much like other dreams : that is to say, a perfect farrago of nonsense. Every one he had ever known in his life—and a few more, such as Robinson Crusoe, the Sleeping Girl of Trumpington, the late Mrs. Shipton, Governor Picton, Richard the Third, and Julia Manning, whom he had only known from books—were all assembled at Silcotes, none of them either doing or saying in the least what they ought, or what they wanted. The only point in common which they had,

from Robinson Crusoe to the steward's-room boy, was that they were all waiting for Dark Squire Silcote. He put in an appearance at last, but in that unsatisfactory way common to dreams. He never really appeared: he only spoke, in an awful voice, at the sound of which every one bolted, and the boy awoke. What the Dark Squire said was, "Sir Hugh Brockliss is a fool, an ass, and a prig. If you set to work breeding fools, you must succeed sooner or later. The Brocklisses have been fools since the Conquest, and they married his father to Lady Emily Llywellyn, and the Llywellyns have been fools since the Fall. Lady Eve Llywellyn was the woman who did the original mischief with the serpent. I have seen their pedigree at Glyn Dwr. The man can't help being an ass, but I never was beaten by horse or donkey yet. You had best look for that boy, Archy; it is a kind thing to do. Mr. Betts, we will not be beaten by these idiots. Now, if you will fulfil your promise and guide me to Lombard Street, I shall be obliged."

A dream and no dream. The boy had been hearing in his dog's-sleep the voice of Silcote, growling away in the committee-room for above half an hour, and

his dream had fashioned itself accordingly. He awoke to see Silcote, whose figure he knew well, walking away across the hot empty quadrangle, with a seedy, fat-looking old gentleman—to see Sir Hugh Brockliss, whom he also knew well by sight as a governor, standing in the board-room doorway and scowling after him; and to find Arthur Silcote bending over him, smiling.

"You little pea in a drum," he said, "I was coming to look for you. You and I are going out for a grand holiday together. Boy, you have been crying! Have they been ill-using you? Tell me the truth, without fear, now."

James told the truth. Every one about the hospital was most kind to him. But he told the story of his projected expedition, and its failure in consequence of his clothes.

Arthur set his teeth and stamped his foot. "We are going to change all that, boy," he said, "if the idiots will let us. And Sir Hugh Brockliss talks about the associations of the place. Come on, my child. Wash your face, and let you and me go down among the ships. We will mend all this for you,

boy, and mend it soon, I hope. Leave that alone, and come with me."

In half an hour Arthur Silcote had his boy down among the ships at the East India Docks. And, if you ever have a boy thrown on your hands, and if that boy finds himself bored by being taken down the river and shown the ships, why, don't undertake that boy again, for he is not worth the trouble.

James, after his morning's failure, passed after all the golden day of his life. Arthur began by pitying the poor little pea in the drum, and gave him a treat as a matter of duty. As a general rule, a man when he goes down the river does not choose a boy in green baize petticoats for his companion. Arthur took the boy as a mere matter of duty and kindliness ; but, before they had got far on their voyage, he found that *he* was not doomed by any means to pass the most unpleasant day in his life. The boy was such a queer boy. He was so strangely well read, and yet so unutterably ignorant about the visible outside of things. The boy's general floating information was *absurdly* great. When he found himself fairly under Arthur's protection, and, having forgotten

about his ridiculous dress, got confidential, he puzzled Arthur in fifty ways.

There were meetings of the board of governors twice a week now, and the attendance at them grew more numerous, and the debates more animated. He soon began to understand the matter.

Arthur Silcote had taken it into his head that the school should be moved into the country, and that their hideous dress should be replaced by a neat uniform and lighter shoes in which they could play. The whole thing was no business of his; he was in no way connected with the school; but he wished it done, and, consequently, intended to do it, and, consequently, did it. Granby Dixon was no good here; further reforms were left to the governors, of whom he knew only two—his father Silcote, and old Betts, his brother's father-in-law—a very poor team to start with for accomplishing such a great revolution. Yet they were two very good trumps. Betts had become a governor in the time of his prosperity, and was a governor still, and would fight loyally to the death for anything bearing the name of Silcote. He was safe, and moreover was as able a vestry debater as

could easily be found. Then his father! How to arouse his persistent bull-dog obstinacy and ill-temper in the cause, was for a few days a question. He had sufficient influence over his father to make him *move* in the matter; but it required something more than his influence to arouse him from so many years of laziness and selfishness, and make him persist. An old feud, about a worthless piece of covert, was the weapon he found in his hand after a few days' consideration. Sir Hugh Brockliss had crossed his father and gone to law with him on this piece of copse. If there was a man more than another whom his father hated, it was Sir Hugh Brockliss. Sir Hugh was a Tory, another great point; and Sir Hugh had declared for keeping the school where it was, and the dress as it was, on the grounds of the associations of the place. Arthur had only to go down to Silcotes, and point out these facts to his father, when his father arose in a white heat of rage, and committed himself to the question of moving the school and altering the dress, as long as breath was in his body. He cared nothing about it. But anger and personal spleen made him undertake a purpose, and

stick to it with the utmost tenacity until it was carried ; while principle never would have moved him.

Arthur knew perfectly well that, by holding the red rag of Sir Hugh Brockliss before his father's face, he would arouse all the bull-like pugnacity in his father's nature, and get all his father's barristerial ability, and his unequalled powers of debate at his back. Was he justified in arousing that long sleeping volcano of shrewd logical scorn ; in calling into activity the very worst part of his father's character—jealous, suspicious hatred of every one who crossed him ; even in such a good cause as this ? Why, no. But he did it without flinching. This thing had to be done, and therefore must be done, quickly and cheaply, and with the handiest materials. What a narrow young Buonaparte it was at this time !

“ His father's own son,” said the Princess once, little dreaming in her foolish head that she was, unconsciously of course, speaking the truth.

They had their will. Sir Hugh Brockliss left off attending the board, Silcote's powers of logical scorn, which in old times had promised to put him at the head

of one branch of his profession, were too much for the honest kindly country baronet. He wrote a letter to the board, which he and his wife considered to be rather withering than otherwise. He deeply deplored that certain circumstances—he regretted to say, that his duty as an English gentleman constrained him to admit—of a personal nature prevented his sitting at that board again. When he said, as he did with his hand on his heart, that that board, in its collective capacity, was as intelligent and as gentlemanlike a body of men as he ever hoped to meet, he made one exception—he regretted to say an individual one. He would not name any names whatever. He would not point the finger of scorn in any direction; but he put it to that board, whether, after the language he had received from an individual member of that board on Tuesday last, he could, with any sense of decency, further assist at their councils. Of that individual member he had no more to say. To that individual member, if he ever spoke to him again (a pleasure, he was bound to add, which he and Lady Brockliss had determined to forego), he should say that the term “pig-headed,” although ostensibly applied to a political

party, may be uttered with such distinctness of emphasis that it became personal.

This was Sir Hugh Brockliss's reply to Silcote's really fine irony. But they would not have won their game still, if it had not been for old Betts.

A row between terrible old Silcote and pompous honest old Sir Hugh was very good fun, but it was not business. They represented the sentimental part of the affair; and, among a board of Philistine governors, most people will allow that sentiment does not go for much. The Philistines were perfectly ready to clothe the boys decently; but the moving of the school into the country was quite another matter; it meant money.

Here old Betts came out nobly, backing the Squire with endless bundles of papers, which, egged on by Arthur; he had been secretly preparing, and endless rows of figures, calculations of rent, the price of land in the city, the price of land thirty miles from town. The figures were undeniable; the gain was very considerable to the institution. Over and above the cost of a poor tract of land in a romantic situation which they bought, they found they had a very large building-fund

in hand. A clever architect was secured, with orders to *reproduce* the school-buildings. In a year it was done, and now that the beautiful mediæval building was removed from the crowded houses of the city, one could see how really beautiful the original design was.

At length there came the last holidays in the old place, and then the very last morning there. James was again alone at school, and awoke in the empty dormitory at daybreak. It was indeed the dawning of a new day and a new life for him.

CHAPTER XV.

ST. MARY'S BY THE LAKE.

THE new clothes which lay at his bedside, into which he put himself with the utmost rapidity, were the first thing which attracted him on this very memorable morning. He had never been dressed becomingly before ; from a smock frock and heavy ill-fitting boots he had passed to hideous and ridiculous green baize petticoats, with ill-fitting brass lacheted shoes, made of the worst leather ; three sizes among two hundred boys. Now he found himself standing alone in the deserted dormitory, in a short pilot jacket, with gold buttons, well cut shepherd's-plaid trousers, nicely made shoes, fit to run a race in, and a pretty cap, with S. M. H. in gold on the forehead. He did not know that he was handsome, and that he looked attractive in his new

dress. He had no idea of that. He only knew that the old hideous nightmare of the green baize petticoats was gone for ever, and that now he could walk the streets without being an object of scorn and ridicule to other boys. He *thought* that now he was only as other boys were, and would attract no attention ; the fact was, that from an object of contempt he had passed into being an object of envy. His intense pleasure at the transformation made him blush several times, and his intense modesty made him hesitate for a long time before he went down to the lodge. But, casting a parting look—with a somewhat regretful face after all, mind you—on the old white-washed walls, and on the green-baize petticoats and heavy shoes, which lay in a heap on the floor, he went down the stairs, and out into the gravelled quadrangle, whose western pinnacles—after doing duty, more or less faithfully, for four hundred years, condemned as old materials—were just lit up by the sun of the summer's morning.

Will you follow me through the brightest day in the life of a very good fellow, take him all in all ? If you will, read ; if you would rather not, skip. I wish to

please you, but you do not know how difficult you are to please.

Nearly all the servants of the college had been sent on before, to get in order and arrange the new building, which was now, having had the March wind through it, pronounced to be dry and fit for the reception of pupils, and the working people necessary for their instruction in the fear of God, grammar, and plain-song. James was the only boy so utterly friendless and lonely as to be left up for the midsummer holidays, and he was to travel down with Berry, the old porter, and formally to take possession of the new building, in the name of the Society of the Hospital of the Blessed Virgin.

James and old Berry were great cronies. They squabbled at times, for James's vivacity now and then took the form of piratical irritating mischief. But any boy who had broken a window in James's company was comfortably assured of one thing, that old Berry would never report James. What was deliberation on the part of any other boy was mere accident in James's case. The master who had the care of such little logic as they learnt, had remarked once ironically, that Sudden's accidents appeared from their frequent recurrence

to be inseparable, and might be more correctly described as qualities ; but what third master, let him have expended a thousand pounds on his education, can ever hold his own against the porter ? It is Seely against Packington. The porter wins, and James was never formally reported.

“ Hi ! ” said old Berry, as James came into the lodge for his breakfast ; “ we *are* fine. How nice the boy looks though. You look the gentleman all over.”

“ I am a gentleman, ain’t I ? ” said James.

“ Not you,” said Ben Berry. “ If you had been you’d have been reported times out of mind. You’re no gentleman. Where’s your old things ? ”

“ In the dormitory.”

“ Fetch ’em along.”

“ Why ? ”

“ To keep ’em by you, to remind you that fine feathers don’t make fine birds. I ain’t been consulted about this new move myself ; if I had been, I should have gone agin it most likely. Still, I likes the look on it pretty well this morning. But fetch they old things along, James Sugden, as was shepherd’s boy. If you ever forget what you *was*, and forget the mother

that has been going up and down in front of these gates many a time when you have been at football or marbles, I'll report you for the next window as sure as you are born."

"My mother?" said James.

"Ah! your mother!" said Ben Berry. "But what the odds about she? Leastways now. You and I was always comfortable together, and no man can say as I ever reported you. Come, get your breakfast, my dear boy. I have always stood your friend, James Sugden; and if I spoke strongish just now, why I am an old man, and you young ones tries us at times. But I never reported you, James, and you wouldn't desert me now."

"Desert you, Ben? I ain't going to desert you!"

"I know you wouldn't. I know you'll see me through this moving. I ain't moved from here, from this lodge, for thirty year; and since then these pesky railways have turned up: and I'm afeard on 'em. Come, James, see me through to-day. I never reported you, and, by Job, if you get me safe down there, I never will, not if you were to burn the place down under my nose. And you might, you know; because,

in a mind constituted like yours, there's the elements of as outrageous a young toad as I've seen in thirty year. You sleep on that warning, my young friend."

"All right, Ben. *I'll* take you down safe enough."

The passengers by the nine o'clock train from Vauxhall could not help noticing with extreme interest the handsome, well-grown boy in the neat uniform, who so assiduously led about and attended to the fidgety, queer-looking old man in grey. Those who were early saw that the pair were friends, for they had half a dozen comical squabbles together—the old man going the wrong way systematically, and growling at everything, and the boy chaffing him and laughing at him. They were such a quaint, interesting couple ; the joyous brightness and the brisk laughter of the boy contrasted so prettily with the comical, good-humoured cynicism of the old man, that a certain General, egged on by his wife, accosted them, to find out who they were.

"What uniform do you wear, my boy, and where are you going?"

"The uniform of St. Mary's Hospital, sir, and I am going to Basingstoke," for there was no shyness or shame now—that was all left behind with the green

petticoat. And James was so radiant, so brisk, and so bold on this crystal summer's morning, that he would have spoken up to the Queen herself.

"You happy boy," said the General; "I would, but for one thing, change places with you."

"And what is that thing, sir?" said James, with perfect innocence.

The General looked at his wife, and they laughed. "Come in the carriage with us, my boy," she said.

"I should like to," said James, "I should like to go anywhere with *him*," indicating the General by a nod; "but I have promised to take care of Ben Berry, and we are going third class."

"He will be all right," said the General. "Come with us, and I will pay the difference."

"No. I am much obliged to you. I never break my promises. Besides, he has been mewed up there so long, thirty years and odd, that he would be lost without me."

"How did he get on before he had you to take care of him, you very old and sagacious gentleman?"

"Well enough. Got from the stool to the gate, and from the gate back to the stool, in the most perfect

manner, for thirty odd years—I should say, as far as I can judge, the most perfect school porter that ever lived. But he has got old, and wants a proper head to guide him: we shall all come to that some day, I suppose. Your offer is very kind, but I really must go and look after my friend."

"Don't be too sharp, little man," said the General.
"What is your name?"

"Have I been talking too fast, sir?" asked James, wistfully. "I think I *am* a little beside myself this morning. My name, sir, is James Sugden. I was a shepherd boy, and was presented to St. Mary's by Squire Silcote of Silcotes, to whom, in the main, we owe the new change in the school."

"Captain Silcote's father," said Mrs. General. And her husband added, "A bad family; well, I am glad he has been doing some good. He had need."

It was high noon before this queer pair of travellers arrived at their destination, and, after driving in a fly-ten miles from Basingstoke, saw the dear old building, which they had left in London, before them again, reproduced perfectly, from the dormitory windows down to the gargoyles and pinnacles of the chapel. Repro-

duced indeed ; but in what a strange way ! What an astounding piece of magic was this ! They had left the old building that morning in London, hemmed in by ignoble houses on every side ; in the hot noon, they found it again, standing on a lofty promontory, which thrust itself out into a beautiful lake. Behind the college, and to the right of it, the dark Scotch fir woods rolled away, tier beyond tier, the building standing out before them like some new carved toy. In front there was the lake, calm under the noonday sun ; and all around, shutting out the horizon everywhere, rolled the hills, in sheets and scarps of purple blooming heather.

It was a wonderfully beautiful sight—those who have had the luck to see Mitchet Pond on the Basingstoke Canal may guess how beautiful. Very few people know the great beauty of those desolate Hampshire lakes, lying on the Bagshot Sands. They have a *specialité* of their own, from Frimley to Sowley, a distance of some seventy miles. All that a hopelessly poor soil, inferior forms of vegetation, and solitude can do for one, they do. At times they are romantic, as at Mitchet, and at this lake of Purley ; but all of them

on the hottest summer's day, suggest to one wild sweeping winter winds, and warm winter ingle nooks. The sounds of agricultural life are seldom heard upon their desolate margin. The bittern startles some solitary cow in its flapping and noisy flight, and the snipe bleats in the place of the lamb.

In this beautiful building, standing where the forest, the lake, and the moorland met, the lad spent a long, hot, solitary summer, the happiest of his life. The solitude did him little harm, and the freedom did him great good. For instance, in his long, lonely rambles over the great sea-like expanses of heath, from one cape of forest to another, his work of the last half came to him with a new meaning. Virgil and Horace were not mere puzzles of scanning, mere wearisome exercises of memory. In these long rambles he sometimes repeated the passages he knew, from sheer *ennui* or vacuity; he began to find their meaning, and by degrees to admire them, and long that school might begin again, and that he might know more of them. Of English poetry he knew nothing: that was a later revelation. He says now, in his fanciful way, that the undoubted purity and beauty of his outline comes from the fact that he had

not debauched his soul with post-classical literature until he was nearly seventeen. Probably the plain truth is, that he has a keen, steady eye, and a keen, steady hand, and that the kind, genial soul, which is inside the man, acts on the dexterous eye and hand, and reproduces itself. If he chooses to assert that correct drawing can only be got at by an exclusive study of the classics, let him say so. He is not the first man who has talked nonsense about art, and some of our cynical friends may say, certainly not the last.

Whether she had been cruel or kind, he had always feared or admired Nature; but the fantastic, broken prettiness of Berkshire, had puzzled and confused him. A kaleidoscope is one thing; a painted window by Kaulbach at Cologne is another. In this new Paradise he for the first time saw great simple outlines—long lines of forest, long horizons of heather, sometimes at his furthest point southward broken by the square tower of a great cathedral, with the sea gleam beyond and he essayed to draw them, but could not, nor ever could to his satisfaction. Amateurs generally begin their brief career amidst mountain scenery: a mountain like Schehallion or Mont Cervin would set nine men

out of ten to work to paint it. He had no such luck ; he tried to draw the dull, simple lines of the Hampshire landscape, as being the first thing which he recognised as drawable. He failed so utterly that Ben Berry, the old porter, refused entirely to recognise the landscape on any terms. And so James, in spite, late one evening, in the lodge, sitting, with his shoes and coat off on the table, drew old Ben himself, and did it uncommonly well—at least, so every one said except the new drawing-master, who set him at once at pitchers and stiles.

In time summer flamed into autumn. The beds were all made in the new dormitories ; the new organ was tuned ready for the first day's service. The old masters had dined together in the new hall, and had sniffed, with intense delight, the sweet air of autumn from the Hampshire moors ; and at last the boys, wondering and delighted at their new dress, and at the strange, beautiful paradise in which they found themselves, had come swarming back.. James was king among them. He had mastered the new situation, and was always afterwards referred to about cross-country business. He fairly kept the lead he had taken. He had learnt to

swim during the holidays, and was almost the only boy who could swim well. October was mild that year; and on the first day, before the whole school, he swam across the lake and back again, and became for a time a hero among these town-bred boys. It was little enough to do; they could most of them do it the next summer; but it gave him a temporary prestige, which was very much increased by Squire Silcote sending him a couple of sovereigns, when he was advised of this wonderful Leander feat by a faithful friend of both parties.

"You are now," said this faithful friend—Arthur, of Balliol, who turned up here, as he did everywhere else, for no assignable reason—"fairly launched. While you were dressed in those wretched petticoats, I could not do you the injustice to introduce you to a certain pleasant family, where there are boys and girls of your own age. At Christmas you will be asked to my brother's house, and will there see a side of life which will be perfectly new to you."

Accordingly he paid his visit to Lancaster Square, and after the Christmas holidays Reginald accompanied him back to school.

CHAPTER XVI.

GARIBALDI AND KOSSUTH ARE STARTLED BY THE APPARITION OF MADAME GEORGEY.

LEAVING now for a time the fresh and free English-like atmosphere of Purley lake, I must ask my reader to accompany me into quite a different one: into the atmosphere which has been made by the collision between European courts and dynastic traditions and democracy combined with "the doctrine of nationalities"—which atmosphere, here in England, generally offers itself to the outward senses with a scent of seedy broadcloth and bad cigars.

Who is there among us who has not in his time met a political exile: who is there who has not met one whom he has admired, and got to like? They are bores, you say. Certainly their cause is a bore. Certainly, at

odd times, when one is busy, Polish and Hungarian politics *are* a bore ; and one does get sick, when one is otherwise employed, of being taken by the button, and having a fresh arrangement of the map of Europe laid before one in a shrill treble, the bass of which consists of a denunciation of the unutterable wickedness of England, for not, with a hundred and forty thousand men, hardly collected, and costing a hundred a year apiece, overrunning Europe with two million of soldiers, and enforcing at the point of the bayonet emancipation of nationalities, and what the Americans call a "Liberal Platform." The cause was always a bore to many of us, even while we loved them, for we most of us thought that cause hopeless, and they themselves were inclined to be bores ; though, thank heaven, the Italians, at all events, by persistent boring, have got what they wanted. And, if you look at it, few great things are done without persistency, which means boredom for uninterested people. Look at the unjust judge. The very man whom I should have the honour to introduce to you directly under the *nom de guerre* of Kriegsthurm, said to me not so very long ago, "Revolution ? yes, revolution. Failure once, twice, thrice, but

always again revolution. The card must turn up some day."

Yet, in spite of their boring us, few of us who have known any thing of them have not had occasion to admire their patience, their frugality, and their charity towards one another. Necessity had first thrown Boginsky the Pole and Count Aurelio Frangipanni the Italian together, and now their respect and friendship for one another, after seeing out so much grinding poverty together, was so great, that to injure one was to arouse the dangerous anger of both.

Frangipanni was a tall, slightly built, gentle-looking man, with a very long face, a good, kindly deliberative eye, and a prominent thin nose. He was neatly, though shabbily, dressed; his face was carefully shaved all over, and his hair was cropped close to his head: his manner was grave, polite, and dignified; he was a gentleman at all points. In politics he was not a democrat himself, but he used to tell you very calmly that he would be willing to make an alliance with the very *parti d'enfer* itself, if it could give him a united Italy.

His beloved Boginsky was a patriot of another order: fierce, dark, mysterious plots were the delight of his really kind heart (never, of course, in any way involving assassination—he was an honest fellow enough). He was a lean, pale young man, of rather large build, without a hair on his deeply-marked face. As far as I can remember, at this period of time, I should say that he was broad-shouldered and athletic. Other things about him are more easily remembered: for instance, the restless defiant pair of eyes, which, however, never set themselves into a scowl at the worst of times; and the long, thin, delicate dexterous fingers, almost as restless as the eyes. We used to believe that the extreme pallor of his complexion arose from a long imprisonment in a Russian fortress; possibly want, and incessant application to the trade by which he got his poor living, that of engraving maps—and engraving them, I fear, very badly—had as much to do with it as the imprisonment. I have borrowed the name Boginsky from the Comtesse de Ségur for him. I went to him once about a certain map, and, when he told me his real name, and I found out who he was, I doubt whether I was ever more startled before or since.

It was a name which ranked with Garibaldi's or Kossuth's at that time.

I am remembering too much, possibly. Both these gentlemen are now prosperous, and, I think, happy. Italy is united, and Poland dead. That Boginsky, in his quiet Australian farm, weeps at times for his dead Polonia, one cannot doubt; but she is only a memory. No doubt, also, that Frangipanni, Deputato at Florence, laments his Boginsky; but the world has not behaved very badly to either of them, all things considered.

I must ask your patience while I introduce Kriegsthurm. Kriegsthurm was a large, powerful, and now a somewhat fat man, though still strong and active. He was a man with a muddy-red complexion, with a fat jowl, which would never shave quite clean; a brown, short-cut moustache, a square thick nose, heavy brown eyebrows, and two evil, steady little eyes. A gross, strong man, who fed glutonously, and ruminated for an hour after meals, with his fat knees crossed, and his cunning little eyes gleaming into quick intelligence whenever there was the least necessity for attention to outward matters. This man got his living ostensibly by keeping a lodging-house, generally frequented by

distressed patriots ; he also did a little photography, and a little of a great many other things which we will not particularize. Among other things, he was a fortune-teller and a subsidiser of spiritual mediums, and, somehow, had made a large and very paying connexion in this line among certain of the upper orders. He was a spy and a traitor ; but Boginsky and Frangipanni believed in him, loved him, and trusted him. He was a thorough-going revolutionist, and far shrewder than such men as our two honest friends before-mentioned. And the man had the power, strange to say, of holding these simple gentlemen in leash. When Frangipanni came back to him in '48, naked and wounded, Kriegsthurm took him in, and set him up again (let that be mentioned to his credit). "I told you not to go," he said. "I told you the pear was not ripe ; and I married a Jewess, and ought to know. And here you are. It will all come in time if you wait for it. A man of your mark should not go Strasbourging and Boulogning. By the by, *his* time will come, you mark my words. Let Boginsky go, if you like : if he was knocked on the head, I could find a dozen like him. And, besides, I am not going to have it done

yet." The man's shrewdness and power were undeniable, and Boginsky, who limped in later, was obliged to confess that Kriegsthurm deserved well of the democracy of Europe. When Garibaldi started for Sicily in 1860, this man ranged and raged through Leicester Square and Kentish Town, arousing the patriotic. "This thing will *do*, I tell you," he said; "the time has come, and the man is on the spot! Don't stint yourselves for money now. Never mind what you owe me. Let it wait. I want the Two Sicilies to begin with. I'll let your three pound fifteen stand."

To this man Kriegsthurm our old friend Squire Silcote in later times propounded the question: "Whether or no he did not think himself, on the whole, the greatest scoundrel in Europe?" Kriegsthurm laughed in his face so diabolically that Silcote stood silent and aghast with wonder and admiration.

In this man's house—a dull, squalid house, in a back street in Kentish Town—on a dull, rainy day, Frangipanni and Boginsky sat at their work. Count Frangipanni was correcting the Italian exercises of one of his pupils; Boginsky was doing his map-work; and they had sat opposite one another for some hours,

scarcely speaking, for bread must be won somehow. It was a dull, dark, dirty room, with what Mrs. Grundy would call a "foreign" smell in it; meaning, I take it, a smell of soup and cigars. But at last a neighbouring clock struck one, and Boginsky cast his graver, or whatever it was, on the table, and cried out in English, for they neither knew well the other's language:—

"Father Frangipanini, I will work no more before dinner; and dinner is due. Father, if thou dottest another *i*, I will denounce thee. Talk to me. My soul is hungry."

"I will talk to thee, dear son, when I have finished my next paragraph. Canst thou never wait?" They thee'd and thou'd one another: they thought from their experience of other languages that it was a proof of familiarity.

"Wait? No. I can never wait. Father, the doctors of medicine in France can open veins and transfuse blood. Father, let us get here a French doctor, and let me have some of your old, cold, waiting blood, passed into my veins. For my heart is like a blazing coal. I want my Mazzini. He satisfies my soul. And he is not here, not there, not nowhere. Have the

assassins caught him ? Give me my Mazzini, or transfuse to me some of your heart's blood, and teach me to wait."

"Titch me to weet," as he said it. Frangipanni, putting away his pens, ink, and paper with his usual tidiness, smiled at him.

"I do not tell you to wait, dear little Pole," he said. "I do not tell you to hesitate in any way. There is the door, my dear, and outside it you will find George Street, Kentish Town, London, England. Cry Havoc, my dear, and let slip the dogs of war in George Street, hey? You want a little wild talk, my son, and your Mazzini is not handy for you. Talk your wild talk out to me, my son, instead of to your Mazzini. Our dear one is safe, no doubt. I say to you that your temper is too hot about affairs, and the king is not ready. Scold me, dear child."

The dear child Boginsky took him at his word, and scolded with a vengeance.

"King not ready? Did ever you hear of a king who ever was ready, unless he was pushed on behind by an overwhelming democracy? I cry out, from the inmost depths of my burning heart, for a democracy,

and you talk to me of kings. Roll a king's head before the coalised scoundrels as Danton did. Let the great heart of every nation speak out in a universal suffrage."

"As in Poland for instance, my child," said Count Frangipanni. "How—knowing, as you do, that the peasantry are most naturally bound to the Russian side, to the side of order, to the side which will give them some sort of peace and security—can you talk such nonsense? Kings are of value, orders are of value. All should be utilised in the great cause of nationality, with democracy if necessary, without democracy if possible. Come, child, no more of it. Am I not an aristocrat myself? You forget your manners, my dear; and you forget also that you are an aristocrat yourself: proscribed it is true, but Louis Napoleon Buonaparte was proscribed till the day before yesterday. Nothing can ever make you anything but Count Boginsky, you know. And you lose your temper over it all, my son. You entertain personal feuds, and have your reminiscences. Now you should copy me in that. I have no *personal* feeling towards any one in the world."

Boginsky laughed, and, throwing himself back in his chair, burst into song, set hurriedly to some wild, whirling dance music—and into no despicable kind of song either; for he had a fine tenor voice, a good knowledge of singing, and was, besides, singing very noble words: indeed, there are but few better:—

“ I heard last night a little child go singing,
‘Neath Casa Guidi windows by the church,
‘O bella libertà, O bella !’ Stringing
The same words still on notes, he went in search
So high for, you concluded the upspringing,” &c. &c.

The older man’s face flushed up. “But I have no personal feeling towards any man whatever,” he said. “This is not the time for excitement either. Be quiet.”

No personal feeling whatever, my dear Count Aurelio Frangipanni? You are quite sure about that? You and Boginsky had argued together about politics a long time, and you had always ended by asserting that you had no personal feeling against any one in the world: while our wild young Boginsky was for hanging up half the European statesmen in a row. The above conversation with Boginsky is not very important, and is only a variation on a hundred others;

but it ended by proving that you *had* a strong personal feeling against one man at least.

For, while they were idly waiting for their dinner—Frangipanni having pronounced against singing of all kinds, even against Barrett Browning engrafted on Strauss, and certainly producing revolutionary fruit—there came a ring at the bell. Then there was a conference in the passage; and then the draggle-tail servant girl, a shrewd enough little cockney on most occasions, who had shown in more princes than one into that parlour in her time, and who did the general work of the house, opened the door, and said—

“If you please, sir, here is the Prince of Castel-nuovo.”

The effect of the little cockney maid’s words was something fearful to see. The calm middle-aged gentleman, Count Frangipanni, without the slightest personal feeling towards any one in the world, bounded on his feet, and cried out, “Death and fury! give me my sword! Is he mad to hunt me down here? My sword, Boginsky! my sword! Traitor, you are holding me!” And the ferocious and sanguinary democrat, who was ready to hang up half the statesmen in Europe in a row,

threw himself on his brother count, and held him back by sheer force, saying, "Now you are going to make a fool of yourself, you know. You would be an assassin at this moment if I was not here to take care of you. Sit down in that chair and hold your tongue. You have bitten your mouth in your passion, and the blood is running. Suck your lower lip, and swallow the blood. Don't let *him* see it; and, if you possibly can, sit quiet, and let me do the talking."

Count Frangipanni had done what he hated doing beyond most men—had made a fool of himself, and been detected in the act by a very pretty woman. He was standing in the middle of the room, towering up in a dignified attitude, white with rage, the very veins in his forehead swollen, and Count Boginsky was still holding him back with both hands, and begging him to be calm ; when there entered to them a very handsome woman in a white bonnet, a rich white lace shawl over a silver-grey moire antique dress, and delicately fitting cream-coloured gloves—a monstrous contrast to their shabby squalor—who began, "I beg a thousand pardons," and then stopped in sheer wonder at the astounding appearance of the two men before her.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PRINCESS, AFTER AN INEFFECTUAL EFFORT TO COMPOSE
MATTERS BETWEEN ITALY AND AUSTRIA, HAS A LITTLE
TABLE-RAPPING.

COUNT FRANGIPANNI was the first to recover his presence of mind. He advanced, blushing deeply, towards our old acquaintance the Princess of Castelnuovo. Boginsky stood staring open-mouthed, utterly taken aback at what one may be allowed to call this "sell," and apparently very much inclined to laugh.

Frangipanni took her for a foreigner, probably because she was so well dressed, and spoke to her in his kind of French. "I owe Madame a thousand apologies for discovering me in such a lamentable disorder. My serene Madame will have the complacency to bend her powerful mind to understand that I am getting old, and am

subject to *éblouissements*. The sudden announcement of the name of so eminent a princess,—here he began to remember that she was an Englishwoman—“of one so devoted to the Ted—I babble—to the Austrian interests, produced a recurrence of my malady. I am unfortunately Italian in my sympathies. The noble kinsman of Madame, unless I delude myself, ornaments still the court of Vienna. May I do the honours of our miserable *menage*, and may I receive the commands of Madame ? ”

Madame, with her silly good-nature, never cared to inquire his name. “ You may depend on it,” she said in *her* French, which was much queerer than Frangi-panni’s, “ that these *éblouissements* are all nonsense. Don’t let them cause you any inconvenience. A *soupçon* of brandy in your tea of a morning will set you all right. Every one has them more or less, though you certainly do seem to suffer more than most, I must say. None of you Italian patriots have much digestion to speak of, you know : that is why you are so troublesome. But I am seeking Herr Kriegsthurm, and that silly girl told me he was here. I make then my apologies and withdraw.”

And she withdrew. Boginsky had time to say, "Is that the Englishwoman whom the traitor Castelnuovo married for her money?" when she came back again, and, standing before the door, opening and shutting her parasol, said, in her native tongue,

"Does Monsieur speak English?"

"He does."

"Will you allow me to say, sir, that I hope there is no ill-will between us. I begin to think that I know Monsieur's face, though I cannot remember his name. Will he favour me with it?"

"To oblige Madame, anything. I am the unhappy Count Aurelio Frangipanni."

"Oh, my good gracious goodness!" said the poor Princess, dissolving into tears, and using a lace pocket-handkerchief most unaffectedly. "This is the most dreadful thing which ever happened to me. My dear sir, I give you my honour that I thought you had been dead some time. And to find you alive, and in this miserable state, makes me so deeply unhappy. Can I do nothing?"

"Madame's disappointment at finding me alive is most natural. Madame's offer of assistance is most

natural also, as it comes from her kind and generous heart. But she must, with her intuitive good taste, perceive that the acceptance of any such offers is impossible on my part. I feel sure that Madame will see that without taking offence at my plain speech."

So spoke the Italian gentleman to the Englishwoman whom he hated and despised, and whose husband had betrayed him most shamefully, in more ways than one, as he believed by her instigation. There was just a little irony in it, but the Princess had not brains enough to see it.

"I am so very sorry for all that took place, Count, and politics are politics, and your side were not blameless, you know, and I have plenty of money, and I am sure that my sainted Massimo, now in glory, would approve almost anything you would mention in a pecuniary point of view. Do think of it."

"I will, Madame, and politely decline it."

"I am afraid I have offended you by the offer of money. Forgive me. I am powerful at Vienna: I represent the Protestant interest there to a certain extent. Can I do nothing politically for you? If you could manage—to manage you know—so far as to let

me take in your submission ; I could manage almost anything for you. Now do speak the word, my dear soul, because I really had not anything to do with it."

So she dragged her coarse-toothed harrow over the nervous and delicate, almost fanatical, soul of poor Count Frangipanni. It seems that the men who came back in the best case from the ghastly nightmare Moscow expedition were the Neapolitans—the most sensitive, most passionate, and yet the most enduring of men. Count Frangipanni was one of them.

"Madame's offers are most politely declined," said he, very gently indeed.

"Then," she said, "I wish you would tell me where Kriegsthurm is."

We have most of us known more than one man who is under the delusion that if you curse and swear in a foreign language, God does not hear you; indeed it is not an uncommon delusion. Kriegsthurm, who had overheard the whole of this from the open door of the parlour, across the passage, must have been under this impression, or he never would have dared to swear to himself in the way he did. Polyglot spy as he was, he exhausted nearly every oath in Europe over the un-

utterable stupidity of the servant-girl who had brought about this *rencontre*. The Princess's very presence there, inquiring for him, he argued, would prove that he had at one time been in relation with the traitorous Italian-Austrian party ; and, if she accidentally let out anything about their former relations—which, as the most loose-tongued woman he had ever met, she was very likely to do—Frangipanni and Boginsky would set it about among other refugees not so scrupulous as themselves, and it would be totally impossible for him to leave England without the chance of a knife between his ribs. “And what the mischief does she want here ?” he kept asking himself in the intervals of swearing. “Does she want foreign intelligence, or hanky-panky, or what the deuce does she want ?”

Hanky-panky, it appeared. She wanted spiritual intelligence of the last moment, on a subject which had agitated and distressed her extremely. She had scarcely taken her seat, and had not been half a minute in the room, when she had told him thus much. The wonderfully dextrous scoundrel was perfectly ready for her even in that time, and interrupted her.

“My dear patroness need not delay over prelimi-

naries. I have been, in consequence of the spiritual *rapport* which exists between your highness and myself, in a state of extreme agitation for these two hours. You have only to look at me, madam, to see that I speak the truth."

"How will that do as to time?" he thought. "I know she has come straight to me; but did she get the news at Silcote's or in town? And what the deuce is it?"

He certainly did look disturbed; even such a cunning rogue as he cannot swear himself into a blind rage one minute, and remove all traces of it in the next. The Princess was very much delighted.

"I was certain that we were still *en rapport*, my faithful Kriegsthurm. How can I reward you?"

"By sharing your anxiety with me, madam. It is worry enough that I, in the interests of the court of Vienna, board at my house two dark assassins. I beg you to remove this new cause of anxiety as quick as possible."

"Then you have no notion of its cause?" asked the Princess.

"Madam, what time have I had to consult any of the

usual oracles ?” And he reflected, “ The first shot was a good one with regard to time ; she has heard something in London. Then he went on. “ But you are fatigued with your long journey, madam ; long travelling in a railway is most fatiguing, and the Great Western carriages are not well ventilated. May I get you a glass of wine ?” All because he knew the woman’s habit of chattering, and because he knew, also, that suggestions of time and place would suggest ordinary ideas to her feeble mind, and make her chatter.”

“ I have not come far,” she said, “ I got my cab at the end of York Street. So I had not far to walk. I am not tired, but I am very much distressed.”

He had it all now. She had come from the barracks.

“ I have been distressed myself, madam, for a long time on the same subject. The original mischief arose from Mars crossing Venus at the hour of nativity in the house of death. Your nephew has not been to blame ; no man could fight against such influences.”

“ I don’t understand astrology,” said the poor Princess. (“ Thank heaven !” thought Kriegsthurm, “ for I am sure I don’t. What an awful fool this woman is, I wonder

what she will stand over this business ?") "I am sure, as you say, that my poor Thomas, my favourite nephew, has been born under evil influences, and is not in the least to blame. But I want a spiritual consultation with you, as to whether his father is likely to pay his debts after this dreadful *fiasco*, and if not, what is to be done. This last business is the worst of all, and the Horse Guards have taken it up."

"We had better have a spiritual consultation, madam. I think everything is ready. Shall we begin? We cannot begin too soon," he added; for he wanted time to think, and did not know as much as he wished.

"Will you darken the room?" said the Princess. Not if he knew it, thought Kriegsthurm; he wanted to watch that foolish handsome face in broad daylight. "The spirits who communicate with me, madam, do not require darkness," he said; and so the rogue and the fool sat down, and put their hands on a table. This seems wearisome and ridiculous; but please to remember that, scarcely four years ago, a large minority of educated people were either playing at, or playing with the same idiotic game, and that many are playing at it still.

"If you are not going to darken the room," said the Princess, "I think I *will* take a glass of sherry. I am so awfully afraid of seeing something. I don't mind the knocking so much after a time, but I couldn't bear to see anything. I should die of fright."

She had her sherry, and they sat down again. For a very long time there was silence, but at last the Princess gave a scream, for which Kriegsthurm, now on the high horse, rebuked her with a scowl. The rapping had begun with what Mr. Dickens calls "a runaway carriage double." Kriegsthurm frowned her into silence, and began taking down the numbers of the raps on a piece of paper with a pencil. The raps all came from beneath the table in rapid unaccountable groups, and by degrees, the table became agitated, and they had to stand up, and then the table, being deprived of the assistance of Kriegsthurm's great ugly sausage-like knee, became quiet again. I don't know how he managed the matter, but it was like a fourth-class amateur conjuring-trick from beginning to end—not to be compared to Frikell or Stodare's worst; but having to do it before a very silly person, he dared, like those gentlemen, to do it in daylight. The result

is what we have to do with, however. When the raps had ceased, the table was quiet, and he had had time to think the matter over, it appeared that the following was the communication from the other world :—

“ Captain Tom Silcote has undoubtedly made a worse mess of it than ever he had done before. There is no chance whatever of his father’s paying his debts again; and any attempt of his most amiable aunt’s doing the like thing will bring on her the anger of the spirits, at present well intended towards her, and may induce them to plague her, for her good, with a Poltergeist. There is no fear that Captain Silcote will marry the Signora Maritornes, being married already, and knowing well what he is about. He had better go to Vienna (“Cheeze it abroad,” it stood in the original pencil MS., before Kriegsthurm had time to bring his mind to bear on details), where his aunt’s purse and influence will aid him. Outlawing will be his portion; and let him keep clear of dark places in Italian territory, lest they should find out that he is his dear aunt’s nephew.”

So much had he time to concoct under the circum-

stances. He got rid of his visitor, and went anxiously back to his two lodgers.

They had no earthly suspicion of him: as loyal gentlemen themselves, they never dreamt that a man who had become their familiar friend in misfortune could be a traitor and a spy. Frangipanni talked persistently in a solemn monotone about his wrongs in general, and the injuries received from Castelnuovo, all dinner time; and warned Kriegsthurm against having anything to do even with his English wife, who could not but be treacherous from the name she bore.

As for Thomas Silcote, his *fiasco* was in the morning papers. In a spirit of sheer mischief, he had persuaded that reckless Spaniard, Madame Maritornes, to go for a tour, leaving her engagement, at the cost of thousands upon thousands to herself, and the great indignation of the public. It was so openly and notoriously the work of Thomas Silcote, and came at the end of so many other shameful scandals, that his collapse was instantaneous. The army authorities interfered, and he was recommended to sell out. Frantic efforts were made by some of the tradesmen to catch him, but he anticipated all the *ne exectas* and arrived safely in Vienna.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SOME OF THE SQUIRE'S PLANS FOR ARTHUR.

"AND so that business is over and done with," said the Squire to Arthur one morning before lunch. "And now the best thing you can do is to go over this afternoon and begin to make the agreeable to the eldest Miss Granby. It will be all right; I sounded old Granby on the matter. And at the same time write to those Oxford people, and resign your fellowship—cut the shop altogether, and pitch your white tie overboard at the same time. It is not too late even now to leave the Church and go to the Bar. Don't let me see those black clothes any more. You must act up to your new position. One parson in a family is well enough, but the head of a family never ought to be in orders."

Silcote said all this in a blundering halting sort of way, with his eyes turned from his son, wandering up and down; he jingled his watch-chain also while he was saying it, and was evidently doubtful, if not actually afraid, of the way in which it would be received. He was not at all reassured by Arthur saying, very coolly,—

“I don’t half understand you. I think we must have an explanation.”

The Squire knew perfectly well how hopeless it was to attempt to bully Arthur. Still, no point would be lost by riding the high horse at first, whereas one or two points might be gained. He was so afraid of Arthur that he had never unrolled his new plans to him, but had trusted that, when they were all in train and half-accomplished, Arthur would submit to them from necessity. Hence his confused announcement of them, which puzzled Arthur extremely.

“I am going to submit to no explanations or discussions whatever. You are now the heir of the house, and I shall trouble you to behave as the heirs of great families are generally expected to behave; with submission to the head of the house. Yesterday you were nobody, a mere fellow of Balliol or some such place.

To-day you are the heir to a very great property ; and, with your talents, you must end in the House of Lords. I have let you have your own way while you were a younger son. I insist that you obey my will now you are the elder."

" You don't mean to say that you have disinherited Tom ? "

" Of course I have disinherited that scoundrel, sir. This morning I have made a new will, leaving the whole of the property unreservedly to you. But I will have my conditions fulfilled. Nothing can prevent my leaving everything to St. Mary's Hospital if I choose. It does not take long to make a will, sir."

" You have done a very foolish thing, and a very unfair thing," replied Arthur, steadily. " Tom will do very well in time, and it was you who spoilt him, as you are spoiling Anne. As regards myself, you might have had the civility to consult me before burdening me with this wretched property and its responsibilities, and ruining all my plans for the future. I have marked out a plan of life for myself, and the possession of great wealth don't enter into that plan at all,—in fact, would ruin it. Conceive a man of my talents and ambition,

and with my fanatical ideas of the responsibilities of wealth, having to drag out his life among the wretched details of a large English estate ! You must be mad."

" Better men than you have done so, sir."

" H'm," said Arthur. " Well, giving you that point, the more fools they. If you don't do your duty by your estate, you are a rascal ; if you do, you cut yourself off from everything which makes life valuable. You, for one instance, make yourself a member of a particular order, and by degrees imbibe the prejudices of that order. I'll defy any man in the world to associate habitually with one set of neighbours, and not take up with their prejudices. And I want no prejudices. There is priggishness enough at Oxford for me. A word or a phrase too often repeated gets a fictitious value, and at last is worshipped as a sacred truth ; and he who dares handle it in any way roughly is a heretic and a villain : the word Reform, for instance. Now about Miss Granby. I have not the honour of the young lady's acquaintance. May I ask why her name was mentioned just now, as a matter of curiosity ? "

"She has eighty thousand pounds, Arthur, and, if I could see her my daughter-in-law, I should not have a wish ungratified."

"You want to see her eighty thousand pounds in the family?"

"Precisely."

"Then why don't you marry her yourself? You are not old, you are quite as good-looking as ever I remember you to have been, and she would sooner have you than me. There would not be the same disparity in your ages. You know she is old enough to be my mother."

"Then you are determined to thwart me in this?"

"Most assuredly."

"Take care, sir."

"I shall take very good care I don't marry Miss Granby. Come, don't let us quarrel; we quite understand one another. Tom will distinguish himself, and be taken back into favour again. You know he has got a commission in the Austrian army?"

"No. It is impossible. The regulations would not permit of it."

"Nothing is impossible to our aunt, the Princess,

at Vienna, it seems. *She* has managed it. He is fiddling at the top of the tune there."

"With her money, I suppose?"

"So *I* suppose."

"He will ruin her, as he would have ruined me."

"I fear there is very little doubt of it."

"Can't you warn her."

"Yes, I can warn her, and so I can warn her brother, my most gracious father; and so I can warn the thorough-going Radicals: but with the same result in every case."

"It is a bad business," said the Squire. "Your aunt is very foolish, Arthur. And she has got a very pretty bit of money of her own. She has a terrible slippery tongue, but she can't have a bad heart. Arthur, I believe she is very fond of me still, and I have not spoken a civil word to her this twenty years."

"More shame for you," said Arthur. "Why can't you be kind to her? It is all nonsense, you know,"

"Is it?" said the Squire. "Come, I wish you would drink some more of this wine; it is real Clos Vourgeot, of the first *crus*. I imported the hogshead with Cass of

Northcote and Sir Charles Haselburn; you can get no such claret at Oxford."

"I am aware of it; but I take very little wine."

"I fear you don't take enough. What makes you so pale? You get paler year by year: sometimes you look quite ghastly."

"Yet I never look *ill*, do I? I work a great deal—a very great deal—and very much by night. In consequence of something a fellow-tutor said to me a few years ago, I determined to work mathematics up to the Cambridge standard, and I have done so. I am now examiner, and correcting the papers last term has pulled me down. Don't mention my health. I dislike it. I am perfectly well."

"On your honour?"

"On my honour. I have never had a day's illness since I was a boy. The reason I dislike the mention of it is that, to me, the loss of health would be such a hideous disaster."

"I wish I could see you well married, Arthur."

"I thought we had done with Miss Granby."

"So we have, if you like. One could as soon make water mix with oil as make you marry any one you did

not like ; unless you made it out to be your duty, and it don't seem to be part of your duty to obey your father. We will say nothing more about her. I should not object to any other, provided she was—— ; provided she met your views, of course. Is there such a one ? ”

Arthur, usually so pale, was, in spite of himself, burning red as he answered steadily, “ No.”

“ You are perfectly certain that you mean what you say, Arthur, and that there is no young lady whatsoever ? ”

“ I am perfectly certain,” replied Arthur, looking his father steadily in the face, and getting by degrees less fiery hot about the ears. “ There is no one whatever ! ”

“ I am delighted to hear it,” said the Squire. “ It is a great relief to my mind. That sort of thing never does, depend upon it—— Well, I'll say no more. Now, can I do anything for you ? You must want some money.”

“ I don't want any money, thank you. But I should be very glad if you would reconsider the measure of turning the widow Granmore and her sons out of their farm.”

“ They shall stop in if you like, at *your* request.”

"I only want justice done. I only want to see that you don't do yourself more injustice with the country. What is your case ?"

The Squire stated it eagerly and volubly—delighted to have a chance of justifying himself before a perfectly unbiassed person. "Case, sir ? it is all on my side. I allowed her and three lubberly sons to keep the farm on after Granmore's death, on certain conditions as to crops and fences, not one of which has been fulfilled ; they have neither brains, energy, or capital to fulfil them. She is ruining my land. She is destroying the capital on which she professes to be paying interest. She is living on me. She is breaking every law of political economy ; and I have given her notice. I cannot have my land destroyed by other people's widows : but, after all, it is as good as *your* land now, and, if you say let her stay, she shall stay. Only I warn you that, if you are going to manage the estate on these principles, you had better let me marry Miss Granby in real earnest, and accept a rent charge."

"Well," said Arthur, "in strict justice your case is a good one ; she has certainly no more right to ruin your land than to pick your pocket. Send the baggage

packing. You are only a capitalist, you know, and must, in mere honesty towards the State, behave as any other capitalist. If she is actually over-cropping the land, she ought to go on every ground. I am quite convinced.” And so Arthur rose, whistling.

“Is there no middle course?” said the Squire, before he had reached the door.

“Eh?”

“Any middle course. Nothing short of turning her out?”

“Oh yes, there is a middle course, if you think yourself justified in pursuing it. Renew her lease for a shorter term on more stringent conditions, and lend her some money at four per cent. to start with. She knows what she is about fast enough. That is a middle course. I don’t recommend it, or otherwise ; I only point it out.”

“Well, I will follow your advice then, young sir. Is it the new fashion at Oxford to incur obligations and shirk out of the acknowledgment of them,—to persuade a man to do what you wish in such an ill-conditioned manner that the obligation actually appears to be on your side? I will do as you wish, Arthur, and most humbly thank you for asking me.”

Arthur left the room, and was gone about ten minutes. When he returned he came in very gravely, and laid his hand on the Squire's shoulder.

"Father," he said, "I thank you very heartily for all your kindness to me, more particularly in this matter about the farm. I will, in everything, follow your wishes as far as they do not interfere with my private judgment. I have not behaved well to you to-night, and I ask your forgiveness."

CHAPTER XIX.

SOME OF ARTHUR'S PLANS FOR HIMSELF.

IT cost him something to say those last words, even to his own father.

How far can a man, even of the strongest will, succeed in curing the faults of his character? He may repress them, and hide them from the eyes of other people almost entirely, but they are there incubating. And when the moral system gets out of order, the moral gout gets twitching again. A man has generally contracted all the faults of character he will ever be plagued with this side of the grave before he is sixteen; some being hereditary, some coming through foolish education, and some through evil opportunity. The life of the most perfect saint would be the life of a man who by misfortune had found himself at years of dis-

cretion the heir to a noble crop of evil moral instincts, including of course the accursed root of the whole evil tree, selfishness ; and yet who had succeeded, through all states of ill health, poverty, and the temptation of prosperity, in keeping them in repression ; in never even betraying to the world the fact of the temptation ; the fact of the evil disposition existing at all ; knowing himself to be often in wish a sinner, yet, acting throughout his life in every relation like a saint. Such a character is possible, and yet even of such a character one could not say that he had *cured* his worse instincts ; one could only say that he had most nobly suppressed them.

There are those who hold the very noble and glorious belief that, through the grace of God, and the persistent imitation of Christ, evil instincts themselves become eradicated, and at the last that the soul itself quits the body in perfect accord with her Saviour. Of such a divine creed let us speak with reverence, and deep admiration. We have not to do with such great and deep matters here ; but only to watch how circumstances acted on a clever man's habits of mind, changing them from time to time.

We were speaking of Arthur Silcote; a man who took pride in dexterously, and with shrewd common sense, steering clear of the Pantheists of those times on the one hand and the Tractarians on the other; and destructively snapping, bitterly enough at times, at the weak points of each; and constructively building up a most queer and adaptive form of orthodoxy, which the more advanced and embittered spirits on either side agreed (in that if in nothing else) would certainly get him a bishopric in the end.

*H*e was no saint, although a man of perfect purity in morals, and one who made duty and self-sacrifice (as he thought) the first object of his life. If you told him that ambition and love of power were the main-spring of most of his actions, he would honestly admit it, and say coolly in addition that he felt himself fit for power, and that it was therefore his duty to acquire it. Continual and uninterrupted success from his very youth had developed in him that form of selfishness which we call self-confidence. He had, *with* his self-confidence, taken stock of this same vice among other, real and imaginary, imperfections, to be cured in his scheme of making himself a perfect and successful

character; and, as Mr. Pip when he wrote out a schedule of his debts and left a margin, thought it was as good as paying them, so Arthur, when he wrote down "overweening self-confidence" in the analysis of his character, alongside of gluttony and laziness, thought that the former devil, being *en visage*, was of necessity laid with the two others. Nevertheless Arthur had been a prig at school sometimes, and, in spite of all his spasmodic efforts to the contrary, was a little of one now. He was a man whose goodness shamed one, but he was without the quality of *bonhomie* now, as he was five years before, when the old tutor at Balliol warned him of this fault in his character, and when he so faithfully determined to amend it.

His influence among undergraduates was less than nothing. The year of his proctorship he was nearly howled out of the theatre; although no one was able to bring a single case of injustice against him. Perfectly without blame himself, he was utterly unable to make allowances for lads scarcely younger than himself. He had been warned about the reckless stinging use of his tongue by wise and good friends, and he thought he had conquered that habit at least; but with overwork

the old habit came back, and his sentences against undergraduates were embittered sometimes by cruel words, so that men said they would sooner be rusticated by the other proctor than gated by him. His manner as an examiner, too, was cold, contemptuous, and inexorable ; the "shady" man, whose cruel fate left him to Silcote of Balliol, felt himself half plucked before he began. And yet these were about half a dozen men, all of the first mark in the university, who believed in him, as Jourdan believed in the young artillery officer Buonaparte, and who swore that he was not only the cleverest, but the best and kindest fellow alive.

His ideas about women, about their powers of intellect, their great weight in the social scale—whether just or unjust,—their natural capabilities of learning logical reasoning—whether their sentimental conclusions came from an inferior intellect or from the want of a university education—are not of much value, seeing that he knew nothing whatever about them. But he would real it you off by the yard about women, with his hands in his pocket comfortably, and would leave you with the impression that they were to be tolerated, but that he did not think much of them.

Miss Austen! Oh certainly, but then any one could write a novel. Her novels far better than Smollett's or Fielding's? Certainly, they were more entertaining and were without the element of coarseness. Mrs. Somerville and Miss Herschell? They had shown a certain capacity for figures. Mrs. Hemans? Pretty idea of rhythm and pathos. Miss Barrett? Well, he would give you Miss Barrett, if you came to that, provided you admitted her to be an exception—otherwise would argue on until it was time to knock out of college. Madame Dudevant, then? No, on no account. She only reproduced that rebellion against formulas which expressed itself in the lower thought of the Reformation and the French Revolution. Mere overstated cases against old formulas did not constitute original thought. She was Heine's youngest sister's ghost, without his powers of epigram or rhythm. Miss Bronté? A good and nervous, though coarse, describer of a narrow landscape. And so on: on this, as on every other subject, apt to be bitter when he knew his subject, and trying to be smart when he did not.

One Christmas-day, as the reader may remember, a

most absurd accident threw him very awkwardly against his brother's governess, Miss Lee. He had entertained a considerable objection to that young lady, and his more intimate introduction to her had been exceedingly unfortunate ; but fate would have it that he should try to remove that awkwardness by sitting beside her and talking to her. Perfect physical beauty and grace, combined with propinquity and opportunity, will have their due effect as long as there are finely-organized men and women in the world ; and so Arthur, by the end of that somewhat memorable evening, discovered that Miss Lee was not understood where she was, and that her studies required directing, and her mind forming : in short, he determined to devote a little of his spare time to taking Miss Lee in hand, and seeing whether or no it was too late to make anything of her.

Apparently there were considerable hopes that Miss Lee would not become an utter castaway. He evidently had great expectations of doing something with her, though it was rather late in the day ; some hope of providing her with fixed opinions on which to shape her character, and of giving her an object in life. He

took to his task with a will, and Miss Lee's profound submissive reverence evidently gave him satisfaction, for he persevered in a way which drew the warmest praise from his brother. She was ignorant of poetry (she suppressed the fact of a tolerably extensive acquaintance with Byron); she must be introduced to the exquisite tender purity of Tennyson, and have the deeper passages explained to her—sometimes, Madam Dora declares, in the square by moonlight. She was ignorant of history; he was kind enough to read to her aloud the account of a Highland fight, in which thirty people were killed with the usual brutality, in the sonorous prose of the late Lord Macaulay. Further Miss Lee's touch on the piano was most unsatisfactory, it wanted firmness for sacred music; and nothing but Arthur's continued attention cured her of the odious habit of keeping her wrists higher than the keys. In short, it was the old story—Monseigneur amused himself. He was short and sharp with her at times, and at times angry, for the poor girl, though not naturally dull, was dull by habit; and, used as she was to reckless freedom, at times his drilling and his exigence were almost unbearable.

At first she submitted to him, and used her every effort to please, from mingled motives of respect, of fear, and of the wish to attract him. He was in her eyes a very great man indeed, a king among men, a man respected, consulted, and looked up to by all the other men she knew of, the savage old Squire included; a man whose prestige was paramount in their little world, and whom she, and indeed others, believed to have the same weight and consideration in the world as he had in his own family: there are such men in most families which are removed from the real world. So she had begun by trying to please him, and gain his esteem (and his admiration too, perhaps, for she had a looking-glass); and went on to find that he was wondrous handsome, and that his speech was so pregnantly suggestive of all kinds of unknown knowledge, and of sources of intellectual pleasure of which she had never dreamt, that she had forgot about her beauty, and wondered how he could ever have taken the trouble to notice one so far inferior to him in every way as herself. If after that *fiasco* of his on the Christmas evening, she had thought of attracting him by her face, that idea soon passed away. She forgot herself by com-

parison of herself with him ; in short, to use the old formula, the poor girl fell desperately in love with him. In an innocent silly way she had thought she would have liked a lover to fetch and carry for her. She had got one with a vengeance ; but there was no fetch and carry about this one.

And Mr. Arthur all this time ? Why, Mr. Arthur could look his father straight in the face and say there was no woman in the case at all, and mean it too. But his temper began to suffer in these times. In Convocation and in Common Room he was getting an ugly name in that way, and his best friends were lamenting it. His enemies, who were many, allowed him any amount of ability, but said that his temper had always been bad, and was getting worse, and that his temper would shelve him effectually. His friends said that there was not a better-hearted fellow in Christendom, but that he was trying too much, and that his nerves were getting shaky. Neither party knew that his fresh irritability arose from the fact that he was thinking too much of his brother's governess, and steadily trying to deny the fact to himself,—that towards the end of each term he had nearly succeeded in forgetting, or believing

that he had forgotten, the existence of such a person ; but that at the beginning of each vacation his wilful legs carried him to his brother's schoolroom, where he saw her again, and found her improved in intelligence and beauty each time ; proving by her improvement that she had perpended every hint and suggestion of his, and acted on them with diligent reverence, and an intelligence which seemed to "square" itself (mathematically speaking) month after month, and promised in time to become very great. He began to see that in this sometime dowdy careless girl there existed a very noble nature, and not a little intellect ; and that he had awakened them. He wished he had never seen her a hundred times a week. If he ever, in his inexorable plans, "contracted an alliance" (he had no idea of your Darby-and-Joan marriages) he must have, first of all, "connexion." Such a preposterous action as that of marrying Miss Lee meant ruin, retirement to a college living, and a wasted life. It was not to be thought of for an instant. And besides, the girl's manners ! He could not train her in other ways ; but what man could speak to a woman on the subject of manners ? It was a worse matter than the "con-

nexion" business. Yahoo brothers-in-law were bad enough, but they might be pensioned. A wife whose family was without interest was bad enough too; but a wife who was so utterly without knowledge of some of the ways of the world as was Miss Lee, was quite out of the question.

CHAPTER XX.

SOME OF MR. BETTS'S PLANS FOR HIMSELF AND OTHERS.

ONE of the circumstances which it now becomes necessary to notice more prominently is the extraordinary friendship which had sprung up between Squire Silcote and Mr. Betts.

It had begun in the battle-royal with the Sir Hugh Brockliss faction, about the removal of St. Mary's Hospital into the country. Mr. Betts's shrewdness, his bold bull-dog style of fighting, the rough carelessness of speech natural enough in a somewhat coarse man finding himself among superiors, who were perfectly aware of his antecedents, and very much inclined to snub him; more than all, perhaps, his intense dislike and contempt for Sir Hugh Brockliss—natural enough,

also, for men of his class are very apt to hate the class next above them : all these things, combined with the profoundest respect for the Squire himself, had won Silcote's heart, and he had admitted Betts to his intimacy in a wonderful manner. As time went on he found that Mr. Betts suited him, and became necessary to him ; and Arthur, coming suddenly from Oxford once, was very much astonished to find Mr. Betts quietly ensconced opposite his father before the fire, with dessert and wine between them, as comfortable as could be.

"This is queer," he thought, "but it may lead to good. Algernon's head trumpeter as the governor's chief confidant. If the fellow will not trumpet too loud, this may lead to a great deal of good. I wonder if he has tact enough to see that."

He had quite as much tact as Arthur in his way. He once, in a natural manner, when the conversation led easily up to the point, mentioned Algernon's noble behaviour to him in a manly straightforward way, and left the leaven to work.

"It'll end in a legacy, mayhap ; but, as for that, the Squire's is a better life than Algernon's. I'll do

all I can; but time is the word, and caution. That old Princess! I wish she was choked with her diamonds, or smothered in one of her satin gownds, or hung in her own Vallanceens. I'd give a ten pun' note, my lady, to know what games you have been up to in foreign parts in your time, and why you are everlastingily bobbing up and down to Kriegsthurm's in a black veil. There's a nail loose in one of your shoes, or you wouldn't be hand in glove with the most pig-eyed, false-hearted, ten-languaged" (Mr. Betts distrusted, with a true British distrust, those who spoke foreign tongues) "rascal in Europe. I could buy your secret of him, my lady, if I was rich enough; but where would be the use of sporting my shillings against your pounds? Old Frankypanny knows all about you, too, but he is such a stuck-up, honourable, poverty-struck old swell that I as much dare ask the Duke of Norfolk. There's old Miss Raylock, too; I was present when she was in the library, rummaging among the old books according to custom; and she was talking as pleasant to me as need be, and as confidential; but when you came in, rustling with your silks, she shut up, did the old girl, all in a minute, as tight as a Chubb's safe, and

begins a bowing and scraping, and sticking her old nose in the air; aye, and looked the princess all over, as well as you, and better too. *She* knows. But she is no good. One of the same sort as Frankypanny. That Boginsky, he is a regular young sieve; he'd be the fellow to work, but I never did trepan a loose-mouthed man, except in the way of business, and I never will. Nevertheless, my fine Madam, I am deeply indebted to you for your well-meant effort to hoist me out of this; and, if I can put a spoke in your wheel, you may rely on my doing so with a thorough good will."

For the Princess strongly objected to the introduction of Mr. Betts at Silcotes. Among her better reasons for this, one can see that she distrusted him because he belonged strongly to the faction of the dispossessed prince Algernon; and it was possible, with such a whimsical man as her brother, that his old dislike of Algernon might die out under new influence, to the terrible detriment of her darling Tom, now become a pest and an expensive nuisance to his father. Arthur, in case of being heir, would deal nobly by his brother: from the wronged Algernon Tom could not hope much,

she argued, not knowing that the Quixotic Algernon, in his blind devotion to Tom, would have most likely given him back nearly everything, or, at least, would have trusted him with far more than would the shrewder Arthur. Among the more ignoble motives for her dislike of Mr. Betts was the fact that Mr. Betts, having done a vast deal of foreign business in his life among shaky Continental bonds, was intimate with a great many very shaky Continental characters, and chiefly with Kriegsthurm, whose close acquaintance with the chances of foreign revolutions had made him a most useful man in old times, and whose information he had paid for handsomely. She knew that Betts and Kriegsthurm were intimate, and, with her usual foolishness, asked her brother if he was aware of the sort of character he was bringing into his house; giving an account of Betts's bankruptcy, with a great many fresh particulars, invented, I fear, on the spot. Silcote had told her that he was quite aware of Mr. Betts's bankruptcy, but that he liked the man. He said it so very quietly, that she saw at once that she had only, by being too quick and eager, aroused the old obstinacy in him, and gave

up her point directly: becoming at once intensely civil and polite to Mr. Betts.

A woman who shifted her tactics in the most transparent manner on the smallest occasion, a woman who in details never knew her mind for two days together, and yet who, with regard to a few great objects, which her weak brain was capable of understanding, could show a persistency to which the stupid narrow obstinacy of her brother was as nothing! Some person remarking once to Miss Raylock that they wondered how such a very decided person as the Squire could have such a very weak and silly sister, that shrewd old lady remarked, "You little know her. She is a thousand times more Silcote than Silcote himself. She is the greatest living impersonation of Sileotism, which has found its latest development in that, to me, dreadful young gentleman Arthur. You may prevent her having her own way, but it will take two or three of the best of you to do it. And she is not a bad woman at bottom."

From this time one of the leading purposes of the Princess's life was the elimination of Betts. She did not exactly know why, or even settle with herself whether

or no it was better to make a friend of him. She knew what she wanted done, and Betts was in the way of doing it. Betts was a cleverer person than herself, and she was afraid of negotiation on that ground. He must be removed. She had only her old set of weapons to fight with—misrepresentation, patience, and affectionate politeness towards the victim. Betts knew her object, and understood her artifices, and she was perfectly aware that he did so: but she knew, better than twenty Bettses, the power of everlasting affectionate civility: it lulls the most hard, bitter man to sleep some time or another, particularly when it is administered by a princess. The victim is sure to become confidential sooner or later, and commit himself. Her instincts in this respect were better than Betts's shrewdness: but, unfortunately for her, Betts had nothing in reserve about his previous life with the exception of his bankruptcy, of which all the world knew. She, on the other hand, felt perfectly certain that a man who was on the best terms with her beloved Kriegsthurm must have some fact in his biography in reserve; which fact could be bought from Kriegsthurm for a consideration, and made

useful. And Kriegsthurm was a great silent ox of a fellow, who was not to be suddenly or spasmodically moved without a large outlay: and Tom was very expensive to her now that his father had pitched him overboard; and so all outward and visible action against Betts was given up for a while.

In a short time Betts saw this; he kept his eyes on her very closely until he saw that she was passive, and then, knowing all the time that she was the key to all the cross purposes in the house, he began his work. He neither saw end or object at first; he only saw that the Dark Squire (whom he found to be not such a bad fellow after all) had been abused, and he guessed that the Princess was at the bottom of it all. The first thing to do was evidently to gain an influence over the Squire, and that was not very difficult.

What the whole Silcote family are plagued with appears to be a kind of moral ossification of the brain. Sometime in his earthly career each member of this family seems to get an idea into his head, which never can be got out again without severe worldly affliction, and the patient efforts of all the well-

meaning friends of the family. And a noticeable thing is, that obstinate families of this kind have so many friends. The most foolish obstinacy among us does beget some respect. Silcote himself, in spite of his brutal rudeness, was most highly respected and feared in the county. Arthur was respected at Oxford. Algernon, when he began to develop the family failing, was respected even by the Protestant party in the parish: even Miss Raylock respected the Princess, though she declined to acknowledge it. But we have to do with Silcote himself now. His particular form of the family failing had led to his shutting himself out of all society, until he began, as a shrewd man, to see that he was falling behind-hand with the world. To him appeared Betts, keen, cunning, and wise in the ways of the world from which the Squire had dissociated himself so long. Is it any wonder that Betts's influence over him very soon became almost equal to that of Arthur?

"I want to see the right done here," Betts said to himself; "but it is all so wrong, that I don't see my way *to* the right. The Squire is not wise, but that is a family failing. However, here is twelve

or fourteen thousand a year to be manœuvred, right way or wrong way, and it is a precious sight better fun working other folks' money than your own.—Ah! there you are, my good friend Squire Silcotes, coming over the lawn to consult me about buying those Welsh bullocks, knowing perfectly well that I know no more about bullocks than I do about church decorations. If I was a fool I should pretend to know something about them, but as I ain't a fool, I shall chaff you about coming to a stockbroker for agricultural information. All you Silcotes want a dry nurse to take care of you; only she mustn't be particular about having her shins kicked, or her nose bit off."

"Mr. Betts," said the Squire, "would you mind coming down to the green, and looking at some Welsh bullocks for me?"

"I've no objection to look at your bullocks, Squire, only bargaining that you should tell me which is the head and which is the tail."

"I wanted your advice with regard to buying them."

"When was the bailiff took ill, then?"

"He is not ill."

"Then why don't you ask him about the bullocks ? He knows a deal better about them than a stock-broker. You ask too much advice, Squire ; and, what is more, take too little."

CHAPTER XXI.

JAMES HAS A WET WALK.

"STAND there," said Dora, "and I will show you how it all was. You are not quite in the right place yet. You must stand close to the fire, with your hands spread out, blinking your eyes. There, that is just exactly the way you stood on the very first night in that very same place, with all the dogs round you, and your face all bleeding and bruised, and your dirty little cap in your hand, and your dirty little smock-frock all over mud; and you looked such a poor little mite of a thing that I cried about you when I went upstairs, and was peevish with Anne because she wanted to go on with the silly play about Esquimaux."

James Sugden stood for a few minutes looking into

the fire, without answering. He had grown to be a very handsome upstanding young fellow indeed ; with more than the usual share of physical beauty, and a remarkably clear resolute pair of eyes. There was also a dexterous rapid grace about all his movements, not generally observable in sixth form hobbedehoy youths. He still wore the uniform of St. Mary's, and was in age about seventeen.

For the first time he had been invited by the Squire to spend his Midsummer vacation at Silcotes and join Algernon's children in their yearly holidays at their grandfather's grand house. He had hitherto spent all his vacations since the removal of the school in Lancaster Square ; and the summer vacation had been very dull to him ; for Dora and Reginald, with the younger ones, had always been at Silcotes. He had been condemned to drag on the burning long summer days alone with Algernon and Miss Lee, and had always longed intensely for the time to come to return to school. This year, however, Mr. Betts had written to him to say that he was to render himself at Silcotes by five o'clock on the twentieth of June without fail. So, committing his box to an

intricate system of cross country carriers—each of whom was supposed to meet the other without fail at obscure villages, and remember a vast number of obscure directions—he had said good-bye to his old friend, Ben Berry, the porter, and, taking only an ordnance map and his sketch-book, had started from St. Mary's by the Lake early in the summer's morning, with his face set straight towards Silcotes. “Only two half-counties to walk through, before the afternoon, my Ben,” he said on starting. “Not much that, hey! Not so bad as the journey down here.”

A resolute young fellow enough. A Silcote could not have been more resolute. The glory of the day waned as he walked stoutly on, until he saw his familiar old Boisey in the hazy dim distance at noon. The distance was very hazy, and the air was very close and hot, yet he held on through a country utterly strange to him, choosing always, by that geographical genius which one sees in some men, but not in very many, the roads which would suit his purpose, and end somewhere; in preference to those, apparently as much traffic-worn as the others, which only delude one by leading to the parsonage house

and the church. The course was north-east, and the great Alps of thunder-cloud, creeping up through the brown haze, had met him and were overhead when, having crossed the infant Loddon at Wildmoor, and having delayed to pick, for Dora, a nosegay of the beautiful geums and orchises, which to him, coming from the heath-country, seemed so rare and so rich, he turned into the deep clay lanes towards the heath.

By this time every one was getting to shelter, and the thunder was loud. The landlord of a little roadside inn he passed urged him to stay, and not go aloft on the desolate open heath, where a man had been killed by the lightning not long before. But weather mattered little to the shepherd lad, and he pleasantly declined, saying, that "he had not time." The landlord looked curiously and admiringly after the swift-footed pleasant-looking young gentleman as he sprang up the steep ascent towards the thunder; but James never paused, although the storm came down fiercely now, and Boisey was hidden from him completely. In Bramshill Park, the lightning was leaping and blazing all around him, lighting up the dense cloud of rain in every direction, and once, with

a snap and a roar, it shone in blue and white reflections from every window in the whole of the vast façade of the house, showing him that he was close to shelter. But the humour was on him now; he would walk on, though not altogether recklessly; the storm had settled down on the park, and was tearing and riving at that most beautiful spot, till it had exhausted its fury; even in his headlong humour he knew this, and kept away, as far as possible, from the trees. Before he had been long in the park he had received his caution on this head: a great oak loomed on him out of the rain, and he suddenly saw a bright spark in one of the forks of it; and before he could put his arm over his head, eight centuries' growth of timber was scattered around him among the fern and the heather. Yet, though he saw the figures of men about the stables beckoning him to stay for shelter, he held on. He had set it in his mind to be at Silcotes by five o'clock, and he held to his resolution with steady good-humoured tenacity.

The next village and street was a stream of water as he passed through it; no soul was out of doors; and, as they saw him pass, they wondered whether

he was penniless or desperate to walk in such weather. Had some of them known that he was bound for Silcotes, they would not have wondered at all: it would have merely been Hamlet going to England. By the time he had passed Bear Wood, he had succeeded in walking down the storm, and Boisey was close before him in the sunlight of a very practical and quiet summer's afternoon. The reckless fit passed when he found himself in decent and ordinary weather, and he began to bethink himself how he should look at his journey's end, and what the Squire would say of him in his present very untidy condition.

The uniform of St. Mary's, carefully developed by the theoretically-minded Arthur, and the really practically-minded Mr. Betts, was as well calculated to recover from the effects of weather as that of a French soldier. Yet, in his intense eagerness to see some bit of the old country again, to be again within the range of his earlier experiences, he begrudged even the time it took to dry his clothes, which he did at a river-side inn. He now got into the old country at last, and changed his pace suddenly; for, anxious as he

was to get to the Silcotes' country, he was anything but anxious to meet the Squire.

He had come so fast, that even the drying of his clothes and the dawdling along by old familiar paths did not make him late. Every hedgerow was familiar to him, and such an incident as the mending of a stile, or the filling up of some time-honoured gap, was of strange importance, and tempted him to delay; but, nevertheless, as the turret clock struck five, he peered through the open door into the dark and empty hall.

Empty but for one figure. Silcote himself was seated before a wood fire in the great cavernous fireplace, and which was never without fire, summer or winter. Hearing a footstep on the threshold, the Squire rose, turned, and looked steadily at him for one moment.

He was not changed. There was the same sturdy, strong figure, and the same grizzled hair, so familiar to James from his childhood. It was the same old "Dark" Squire who advanced towards the young man as he stood, hesitating and modest, in the porch; but there was a look about that Squire which James had never seen before in his cursory observations of his

face. Something had gone very wrong with the Squire this morning. Things generally did go wrong with him, but the effect generally was mere petulance and ill-temper. On this occasion the Squire came forward with his head bowed down, and an expression of grief and terror on his face. James thought he was coming to speak to him ; but, to his great astonishment and alarm, Silcote passed him steadily, waving him on one side with his hand, and then stood in the porch beside him, but looking away from him, and said,—

“ It is of no use. I will not recall what I have done. You have had chance after chance, and you have turned persistently to evil. Even if God pleases to deal with me as heavily as He threatens, it will not benefit you. When all is done, I may fall back on another beside you. You have no right here ; this is one of the innumerable theatrical follies of my sister. You have had my answer once, and, even in this deep affliction, I have all my own obstinacy about me. The house is at your disposal, but I am not accessible. The Princess and you have arranged this between you. Pray carry out your arrangements in my house to the utmost. I wash my hands of the whole matter. I only caution you of

the extreme danger of your presence here, and assure you that I will do nothing whatever to stay the course of justice."

It was evident to James that the Squire had driven himself mad at last, as his mother always said he would. Thinking it best on the whole, however, to justify himself, even to a madman, he turned to Silcote, as he was passing on, and said humbly enough,—

"I beg your pardon, sir, but it was by your own orders that I came here."

Silcote turned, and looked on him again. At first he was confused for a moment, but recovered himself very quickly. "My boy," he said, "you must be young Sugden. To be sure. You were to be here by five, and are punctual. That is good. I have had afflictions, my boy," he continued, drawing near to him, attracted by his bright, honest look, and evidently glad to explain himself to any one. "I have had great afflictions through all my life, and the heaviest has come this morning. They confuse me at times, these afflictions of mine, and I took you for my son Thomas; you are like what he was. Be a good son to your mother, boy, for she is a good woman. God is hard on bad sons

and bad fathers ; the Syrians were right there. As for you, I hear nothing but good of you ; all kinds of good from every one. You will die young, but that is no matter ; the good ones always die young,—Cleobis, you know. Make yourself happy here : hear but a word in private. Hold your tongue about what you have heard me say just now. Let it be a secret between us, boy. Dora is in there ; go in and find her. Don't fall in love with Anne, mind ; she is too much of a Silcote : choose Dora. Go in and keep our secret. Not a word to any soul, or it will come round to Arthur at last : he gets hold of all our secrets in time."

James felt a little more dazed than he was in the height of the thunderstorm in Bramshill Park. Here was a curious reception after a curious headlong journey. The first average and commonplace incident which befell him during that somewhat remarkable day was his meeting with Dora in the hall. She was commonplace enough, as she always was, for she at once made him stand before the smouldering fire, and spoke to him the words which stand at the beginning of this very chapter.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MAN IN THE MACKINTOSH.

"*AND I,*" said Dora, "consider that you have improved since that time, immensely, both physically and morally. Other people, as for instance my aunt, may hold the opinion that you are in danger of becoming a very shallow young spark. Miss Lee, whose opinions, more particularly when directed and inspired by my uncle Arthur, I am bound to respect, may be of opinion that we are both getting too old to continue our former intimacy. I am not here, however, to combat other people's opinions, so much as to express my own. And to tell you the honest and plain truth, James Sugden, I have watched you pretty closely for some years, and I think you will do."

"And you will do in time," said James; "that is, if

you will think before you speak, and when you have made a mistake think again and mend it. Which you don't do now, you know. There, that is flippant enough to suit the Princess. Now, let us be comfortable. How are you, and what's the news?"

"I am very well, and I may have some news, or I may not."

"*I* have had an astonishment, to-day," said James.

"So have I."

"Are you going to trump my trick, as usual?" said James.

Said Dora, "I can't tell till you have played your card."

And then James remembered that he was bound by all rules of honour not to say a word of what had passed between him and the Squire, and so he told her that he could not play his trump.

"Then any small card will do for the trick," said Dora. "I have been utterly astonished at the size and colouring of my grandfather's quilled German asters. Now."

"There is something more than that, Dora, I know."

"I suppose you do, unless you are a goose; but, if

we are to play the great game of astonishment, you shall not hold the trumps in your own hand."

"I can't play my trump, Dora. I can't tell you what I have heard in the last twenty minutes. Answer me this. Is there anything wrong in the house?"

"You give up the game?"

"Entirely."

"Well, then, I will tell you; and I am very glad we are alone together. I fear there is something very wrong indeed. There has been a long interview between Arthur and his father in the library. Uncle Arthur came out first, looking as pale as a ghost, a deal more like death than life, James, I assure you; and, after a time, grandpapa came out crying,—ay, he did, and sat there before the fire with his head in his hands for I don't know how long."

"Why, I saw him sitting so myself," said James.

"Did you?" said Dora, "Well, that is an important and valuable fact, supposing any one had the audacity to question my statement. At present we can keep it in reserve. The question is, what is the matter?"

"I wonder what it is," said James.

"I suppose you do, unless you have determined to

give up wondering for the rest of your life. *I wonder.* Any gaby can wonder."

"After all, you know," replied James, "you haven't any right to wonder, because it is no possible business of yours. And you have no right to catch me up so short. I dare say you think that sort of thing very fine, but I don't. I don't approve of it. You are fond of doing it to me when we are alone, but you know you never dare do it before company, for fear of my picking you up. I thought you were going to be comfortable. If this is what you mean, you had better be *uncomfortable*."

"I *am* uncomfortable," said poor Dora, stamping her foot, and beginning to cry. "I meant to be so nice to you, and I am so very fond of you——"

As this is an eminently unsentimental story, I will omit what passed before James and Dora were standing looking out of the window together, perfectly "comfortable." "*Paul and Virginia*" is not out of print, surely, though I have not seen it lately.

But though Dora was "comfortable" enough with James, she was far from being good company; at least to any one but him. Everything was going wrong, it

appeared, at Lancaster Square (she *said* that things in general were all mops and brooms, an expression which we are forced to trace to Miss Lee in her earlier form of development); grandpa Betts was always here now (meaning at Silcotes); and poor pa had not a sound head left in the house to guide him except hers. There was only one pupil left now, young Dempster, who had only stayed on to propose to her, and had got *his* answer. There were no new pupils coming. The weekly bills were all in arrear, and likely to be, for her father had declared for ritualism, and the pews would all of them be empty in three months. It was a sudden resolution. He had been brooding over the matter for a long time; but after his recent visit to Oxford he had decided, and declared that nothing would move him now. If grandpa Betts had been by his side, he could have made the thing more palatable to the parishioners; he always warned pa to let them down to it very easy; but then he was here, concocting business of some sort with grandpa Silcote, and so what was the use of talking. Algernon's health was worse than ever, and he had to swallow a king's ransom in cardamums and gentian, and, though the

doctor might wait for his money, the grocer certainly would not. Then she passed to Miss Lee. Passed to Miss Lee, and stopped. "I cannot speak of her. If I dared tell her that she was neglecting the duties nearest to her, she would only say that she is fulfilling higher ones. I wish she could find time for both. But she can't, and she is a good woman. Believe in Miss Lee; will you, James?"

"The last saint in the calendar; certainly," said the public school-boy. "About the Princess, for instance. From a great variety of hints I have received—or, to be perfectly truthful, from a vast number of conversations I have heard, as an unappreciated and unnoticed fourth party in your father's house, between your father, Arthur, and the banished prince Thomas—I have formed the conclusion that she is at the bottom of every piece of mischief which happens in this house. How does she stand affected in the present instance? Here we have all things going wrong, both at my old home in Lancaster Square and at this new home here at Silcotes. A woman is at the bottom of it you know. Tell me about *her* movements, and I will form my judgment."

“Vanity Fair, Vanity Fair,” replied Dora at once; “you are talking *Vanity Fair*, my lord. The book that makes every schoolboy who has read it believe that he is a man of the world. Bless you, *I* read that book, and thought it was the key to the world. But Miss Lee and Aunt Mary have cured me of that. Don’t talk *Vanity Fair*. Be a boy.”

“And don’t you give me your father’s remarks on that book at second-hand. Come now.”

“I think we had better have no more of this crude babble,” said Dora.

“And there spoke your uncle Arthur,” said James.

“Well, here come Reginald and Anne,” said Dora. “My dear James, we shall never do Beatrix and Benedict. We have not the art. Let us be friends.”

There entered now a pale, delicate, but very amiable-looking boy, a boy say seventeen, and with him a very beautiful girl, of nearly the same age. The pair were indescribable, simply because there was nothing to describe as yet.

They were merely a well-looking enough boy and girl, but in no degree remarkable as yet in outward appearance. To the shrewder, and younger, or rather

more slowly-developed pair who watched their entrance, there was something observable: they had been quarrelling, and were not on speaking terms with one another. James and Dora "sparred" continually, but never quarrelled. Reginald and Anne, who always paired off together, seldom or never "sparred," but spent their time between strongly ostentatious bursts of affection and long periods of sulks. They were sulking at one another now, in a more than ordinary way; and Dora was so fully aware of this fact, and followed her kindly instinct so far, as to go across to James, lightly pass her hand over his hair, and lay her hand on his shoulder. James, in the most accidental manner, managed to turn his head and touch that hand unseen, and so was enlisted on the side of the peacemaker.

"I have come through such an awful storm," he said, as soon as the usual greetings were given and exchanged, though without moving, for fear of Dora's hand going from his shoulder. "Thunder, and lightning, and rain, beyond belief. But I had some one to see at the journey's end, and I never flinched, Dora."

" You were afraid of grandpa's being angry if you were after your time, and you were more afraid of him than of the thunder."

" Well, there is something in that," said James, throwing back his head, and looking up in her face laughing, " though it may not have been pretty to say so. I knew there was a Silcote, male or female, young or old, at the end of the journey ; and that I was pretty sure to get my nose snapped off somehow. Reggy, old man, it was lucky for you that you came on two days before me, you would have got drenched. There has been no storm here."

There seems to be an Avenger who waits on the heels of good-natured people who try to solve (in a chemical sense), or water away, a quarrel by commonplace. When I say an Avenger, I don't in the least mean your Nemesis. Your Nemesis acts on settled law, principle, and logic, through long periods of time ; sometimes so long, that a matter of exactly eight centuries will go by without a sign of her. She belongs to the atmosphere of tragedy, with which we have nothing to do. The ordinary Social Avenger holds the same relation to her as Mrs. Sherwood's Inbred

Sin (the only agreeable character in the "Infant Pilgrims") holds to Milton's Satan. Your Nemesis is deliberative and inexorably just; your Avenger is sudden and eminently unjust; acting, for instance, in this case, only on the very vague basis that you have no business to talk commonplace on any grounds whatever. The Avenger came swiftly down on James, and gave it to him. The thunder-storm was the very point on which Reginald and Anne had been quarrelling.

"I am glad to find myself confirmed," said Anne, from the window in which she was sulking. "There has been no thunderstorm here; and there will be none. And he has hurried me home here, from where we were comfortably by the river, watching the fish, because he said there would be thunder directly. He would not have his health if he did not have his own way."

A tremendous crash of thunder among the beech-woods close by only made matters worse. Reginald was right, which was profoundly exasperating; and, what was more, took every opportunity of reminding her of it, in the pause between each blaze of lightning and each rattle of thunder, till his voice sounded like

a response in some terrible litany. The quarrel was not mended that night.

But the hours, and the bells which announced the hours, were as inexorable at Silcotes as at any Trappist monastery. In spite of a wild imbroglio of weather outside, the dressing-bell rang its defiance to the thunder, and they went to dress. Then the dinner-bell rang, and they came one by one into the blue drawing-room, bluer than ever with the continual flashes of lightning; and were marshalled solemnly by the butler into the long oak dining-room; where these young people were set solemnly down to their soup, in a thunderstorm, with a butler in black, and four footmen in crimson plush breeches to wait on them.

Ridiculous enough! The youngest footman was the most intimate and bosom friend of James in the old days, and James was dying to compare notes with him: but there was an awful gulf between them now. They had been school-mates, and had been shepherd-boys for neighbouring farmers, and many times had surreptitiously driven their sheep close together at the risk of their mixing, at the risk of a terrible beating, that they might while away together some few of the

hours of a winter's day by the interchange of such human thought as was working in their dull little brains. But the tall young footman took no notice of the handsome young scholar, beyond insisting, in spite of a martinet butler, on waiting on him, and on him solely, and plying him with every kind of sauce, the wine not as yet being within his jurisdiction.

In the midst of this very awful dinner, the Princess, now seen for the first time, swept in solemnly, and took her place at the head of the table. It had pleased her, for purposes of her own, to dress herself like Mary Queen of Scots, and she sat there and presided at the table, with her jewels and lace lit up every moment by the lightning, looking as theatrical as she could possibly have wished herself. In general she was very cheerful and playful with the children, but something had happened in the house that morning, and she was determined to make the most of it. She greeted them all courteously, but scarcely spoke, and left them again as soon as the dessert was on the table. Of the Squire or of Arthur there was no sign.

The young people got free soon after this, and James's first movement was to catch his quondam friend, the youngest footman. Time was short, as it might please the Squire to come down for coffee, and he dreaded offending him. "George, old fellow!" he said, catching him in a passage, "what is wrong in the house? Do tell me."

"It's Mr. Arthur," said the young man hurriedly. "He has been having fits, and kept it to himself. But he can't live three months. That is what is the matter."

The storm swept by, and left a steady down-pouring rain. Reginald and Anne had gone away to different parts of the house, with their childish quarrel still festering between them, and Dora and James sat together before the wood fire in the great hall, alone and almost silent, complacent in one another's company, comparing notes and exchanging opinions on the past and future.

The whole of the house was nearly silent; there was only to be heard the whisper of the now distant thunder, and in distant offices the deadened sounds of the great domestic life which it pleased the

Squire, in his useless ostentation, to keep around him. A footman had come in, and brought a tray with wine and water. The butler had come in a long time after, and, having looked around him, had disappeared again like a black respectable ghost, who wished to assure himself that the other ghosts in that great hall were conducting themselves properly, and not annoying his master's guests before the proper hour of night. James had not told Dora anything about her uncle Arthur; and they had arranged to be "comfortable" together, and were carrying out their intention, with the example of Reginald and Anne before them, by saying the first thing which came into either of their heads, and not contradicting one another (which is the true base of the art of conversation) when night suddenly became hideous. I think, when we were first introduced to the Silcote *menage* there were about a dozen blood-hounds. Since then the breed had become valuable, and Mr. George had paid considerable sums of money for several of them. The Squire never objected to the turning of an honest penny, and had kept up the breed, so that there now were some

twenty of them, and they all began barking and baying at once.

James and Dora had hardly time to say, "Somebody coming," when a step was heard at the hall-door, close opposite to them, and the man who trod that footstep, whether frightened by the horrible noise of the dogs, which he had every reason to believe loose, or anxious to get out of the rain, or unable to find the bell, began rattling at the door with all his might. James, with a certain terror of the dogs in his own mind, solved the difficulty by walking across the hall and letting him in.

The man he admitted at once walked half-way across the hall before he spoke. Then turning to James he said, "Young gentleman, I guess from your uniform that you are in the navy. Sea-going is notoriously good for the nerves; as Trafalgar shows. But even at Trafalgar there was no talk of Lord Nelson being eaten alive by bull terriers. Consequently I hope you and this young lady will excuse my abrupt entrance. I wish you a good evening, miss, and all good fortune."

He was a lean, sallow, black-whiskered man of

a doubtful age. He stood before them dressed in mackintosh, dripping, and they wondered with a very great wonder who he could be.

"You need not be afraid of the dogs, sir," said James; "Mr. Silcote generally keeps them tied up. And there has been no accident with them for above a week. Did you want Mr. Silcote?"

"No," said the man in mackintosh; "unless I am mistaken, I want to speak with this young lady by the fire. Miss Lee, I believe?"

"No," said Dora, rising; "I am not Miss Lee. I am Miss Silcote. Miss Lee is my governess."

"Is not Miss Lee here, then, miss?"

"No," said Dora; "she is not here. She is at my father's house in Lancaster Square."

The man in mackintosh actually swore in the presence of Dora, but apologised for it immediately afterwards. "That is your private inquiry office business, miss, all over. They can't be employed to trace Miss Lee for us, but what they must trace her forty mile too far, and put our people to ten pounds extra expense, if that mattered.—By the by," he added, turning to James, "now we are on the

spot it may be worth while. Do you know these parts, sir?"

"Pretty well," said James.

"What is the name of that village I came through just now, outside the park gates?"

"Beechwood," said James.

"You don't know the name of Sugden in connexion with these parts, do you?" said he in the mackintosh.

"My name is Sugden," said James; "and I was born and bred there."

"Thank you," said the stranger; "and Miss Lee, you say, miss, has not come to spend her holiday here with your grandpa, but is it at Lancaster Square? Thank you very much, miss. I am sure I hope you will excuse the mistake of addressing a young lady as the young lady's governess, but Miss Lee was described to me as being of remarkable personal attractions, and so the mistake was perfectly natural. Mr. Sugden, if you are not too nervous to see me out of the avenue, or if any of Mr. Silcote's people had such a thing as a lantern, I should feel more comfortable about getting back

to my fly at the lodge. The driver remarked that the Squire objected to hired vehicles in his grounds, and, on remonstrance, said he would see *himself* further before he'd go a yard further. You will go with me there? Thank you."

James went with him to the lodge. The man was profoundly respectful to him during their short walk, and, on getting into his fly, said,—

"Present instructions are binding, sir. I am not going beyond them when I ask you to present my respectful compliments to your mother. George Thompson is the name, sir. I wish you a very good night."

And so he drove off. And James, returning, found that Dora was gone to bed, and that the only occupant of the hall was the Princess of Castel-nuovo, as Mary Queen of Scots, who was standing before the fire with a bedroom candlestick, in an attitude.

"There has been a man here, boy?" she demanded of him.

"Yes, my lady."

"German?"

“No, my lady.”

“Italian, then? Do not prevaricate.”

“I am not prevaricating, my lady.” The man was
an Englishman.”

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